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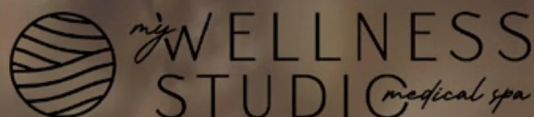
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JAN'25
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029 → 40 under 40

Young achievers are breaking barriers and reshaping their industries and communities.

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090 From bench press to podium

The freshman who's already conquering CrossFit and inspiring future athletes.

STORY: KYLE COPPOLA

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Lake & Sumter Style

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40 Under 40



Village Edition

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Drumroll please . . .

Recognizing the changemakers
guiding us toward a brighter tomorrow.

As we welcome a new year brimming with hope and opportunity, we find ourselves reflecting on the incredible talent and leadership that define Lake and Sumter counties as uniquely special. The inauguration of our nation's new president brings a shared sense of optimism, and as we look toward the horizon, we can't help but admire the bright, young leaders shaping our corner of the world today.

It's our privilege—truly an honor—to celebrate these rising stars with our annual "40 Under 40" feature. This celebrated tradition allows us to shine a spotlight on the entrepreneurs, professionals and innovators who are thriving and redefining leadership and success before reaching the age of 40. These individuals inspire us with their drive, creativity and dedication to making a difference in their respective careers and our community.

From educators shaping future generations to tech pioneers pushing the limits of innovation, to healthcare professionals saving lives, to changemakers driving social progress, the movers and shakers featured in "40 Under 40" embody the spirit of progress. They remind us that the future is not just something to anticipate; it's being

built right now in real time by remarkable men and women.

But wait, we have more exciting news!

In response to an influx of requests, we're thrilled to launch a brand-new feature! Coming soon, we'll present "40 Over 40." This exciting feature will spotlight seasoned professionals, business leaders and mentors in our community who continue to lead with wisdom, inspire with experience and drive change with vision. It's a nod to the trailblazers and steady hands who shaped our community's past and present and continue to guide our future.

At **Lake and Sumter Style Magazine**, we believe in celebrating extraordinary people—those who lead, inspire and make our community stronger every single day. We're committed to bringing their stories to you, because their stories remind us of what's possible when passion meets purpose.

Thank you for joining us on another exciting year of shining a light on the individuals who make Lake and Sumter counties such a special place. Here's to thriving today, dreaming big for tomorrow and always looking ahead with hope.

Happy New Year!



Kendra

Kendra

Have a story to tell?

We're always looking for stories about people who live and work in our area.
Send suggestions to editorial@akersmediagroup.com.

style

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A Calm Oasis: Mindfulness

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

Mindfulness techniques help us become more resilient to life's challenges. Amy Roberts, LCSW and Mindfulness Meditation Teacher at RBOI, says that developing a non-judgmental, beginner's mind is key. "Be aware of your reactions, your thoughts, your body, but in a way that's patient and trusting," she explains. "Don't judge your reactions as right or wrong, or good or bad, but have a childlike curiosity about your feelings, emotions, or responses. It's really extending a kindness inward, but also to those around you."

She points to studies showing that mindfulness

improves memory and concentration. Mindfulness can also decrease stress, anxiety, and depression, while improving quality of life and one's ability to cope.

Roberts offers free Friday meditation sessions on Zoom, for anyone to access. RBOI patients age 55 and older can attend free in-person meditation sessions in Ocala on Tuesdays, noon-1pm, at One Health Center, SW 17th Ave. To learn more about RBOI mindfulness programs, call Roberts at **352-732-0277**. You can also access meditation videos at any time on RBOI's guided meditation page, RBOI.com, under the "Cancer Support" tab.



Take a Rest STOP

How do you create internal peace in the midst of disruption? Roberts recommends the STOP technique.

S means Stop. Pause whatever you're doing. It may help to picture a big STOP sign in your head.

T means Take a big, slow breath. Fill your lower and middle belly, widen your chest up to the top, and then reverse that flow down to the belly button. Take those breaths for however long you need to.

O means Observe. "We're observing without judging ourselves," Roberts says. "With a sense of kindness, the way you would with a friend. What's going on right now? Am I hungry? Am I tired? What do I need?"

P means Perceive whatever you need in that moment. Maybe you need to say, "I'll get back to you tomorrow" or take a brief walk outside. For some people, prayer provides a sense of stillness.

The STOP technique is an internal exercise. "It's something you can do when something is really triggering you," Roberts explains. "Nobody has to know what you're doing, but you can do it quietly for yourself. And the more times you use it, the more it becomes the default."

By the numbers

9.8%

Increase in US adults practicing meditation from 2002 (7.5%) to 2022 (17.3%) (National Health Interview Survey)

>75%

People in the US who say they use meditation for health reasons

As much as 70%

Reduction in PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) in people who practice mindfulness meditation

One-half

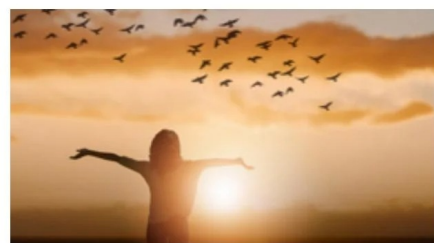
of insomniacs reduce their wakefulness by practicing meditation.

Giving Thanks

Having a gratitude practice can lift you out of a dark place. "Gratitude doesn't mean ignoring what is difficult," Roberts says. "Life is tough, but a gratitude practice balances that a little bit. You're not just your disease. There are other things in your life that have value or purpose or that give you some sense of joy or safety. A gratitude practice helps to balance the heaviness of managing a crisis."

The practice can include a gratitude journal. "Every morning or evening, write down a few things that happened that day or that you have that day that you're grateful for," Roberts says. It can be something simple like, "I really love my hair color today," or, "I have a roof over my head." Then, think about why you are grateful for those things and what they mean to you.

Don't worry if you skip a day or a week, Roberts advises. Just start again. "Patience and empathy are key."



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Dr. Serra was born in Easton, PA. He spent his entire childhood in Bushnell, FL. His father, Gene Serra MD, was a general surgeon in Leesburg, FL and served as his inspiration to pursue a career in medicine.

After graduation from South Sumter High School in 1985 as class valedictorian, Dr. Serra participated in the prestigious Junior Honors Medical Program at the University of Florida, a 7-year combined BS-MD program. After completion of his MD in 1992, Dr. Serra completed a 6-year integrated plastic surgery residency at the Ohio State University in Columbus, OH.

In 1998, he founded Central Florida Plastic Surgery with offices in Leesburg, Clermont, and The Villages. In 2008, the home office was transferred to The Villages and is now the exclusive location for the practice.

Dr. Serra has surgical privileges at UF Health Leesburg and Santa Fe Surgery Center in The Villages. He is board certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery. He is a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, and a fellow of the American College of Surgeons. He resides in Oxford, FL.



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LUNAR-TIC! The Lunar New Year, celebrated in most Asian cultures around the world, begins January 29. Don't be surprised if you see oranges in local Asian businesses and restaurants during this time – they symbolize wealth and good fortune. This year the Chinese New Year Zodiac symbol is the wood snake.



STAY HUMBLE: New to Wildwood, **The Humble Native**, a market, café and boutique, offers “made in Florida” only gifts. Some local vendors include Bibbidi Bubbly Soap, Meme’s Fudge, The Stitching Heifers, Clay by Kirsten and Mad Daisy Crochet. The Humble Native also features ice cream from Yoder’s Southern Creamery and offers sumptuous gourmet grilled cheese sandwiches made with local products like orange marmalade and candied jalapeños. Open at 10am Tuesday-Saturday.

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FURRY FASHION:

National Dress Up Your Pet Day takes place January 14. Here in Lake and Sumter Counties, we love to shop for our little furry friends to keep them in vogue! Find your pet some new duds at one of these local shops:

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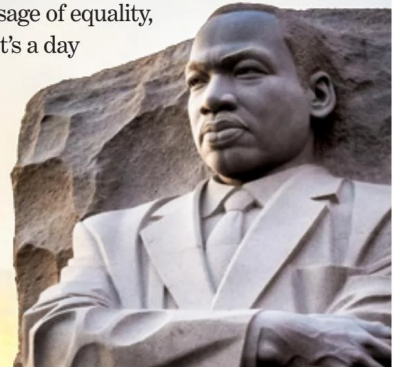
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HONORING THE DREAM: Don't let **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day** pass you by on January 20, 2025. This federal holiday honoring the life and legacy of Dr. King celebrates his leadership in the Civil Rights Movement and his enduring message of equality, justice, and nonviolent activism. It's a day to reflect, give back and continue the work toward a more unified and compassionate world. Consider attending a local event or participating in a service project to commemorate the day.

4



GENERAL HISTORY:

The Florida State Legislature established Sumter County as the 29th county in the state on January 8, 1853. The county was named after **General Thomas Sumter**, a prominent figure in the Revolutionary War. The county seat was originally in Adamsville, but moved to Sumterville in 1881 until the courthouse burned down in 1909, when it was moved to Bushnell where it remains today.

Fun fact: As of 2023, Bushnell has a population of just 3,196.



ON TARGET: Ax-Caliber

Clermont, one of the city's newest attractions, brings adrenaline-filled fun to the historic downtown district. Featuring 16 air-conditioned axe-throwing lanes with World Axe Throwing League targets, this venue offers coaching, challenges and games for ages 12 and up, making it perfect for both casual fun and competitive play. Guests can relax in the spacious outdoor seating area, enjoy delicious food from the Los Reyes food truck, and sip drinks from the Blade & Barrel beer and wine bar. Family-friendly touches like soft targets for younger visitors and a convenient pet-friendly bath and fountain ensure everyone feels welcome. With modern upgrades and rustic charm, this is the ultimate spot for entertainment and relaxation. Book your lane in advance or walk in to join the fun!

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SWEET SLICE SHOWDOWN: Whether you're a cake person or a pie lover, January is your kind of month. With **National Pie Day** on January 23 and **National Cake Day** on January 27, you have the perfect excuse to indulge. Fortunately, Lake and Sumter counties have plenty of bakeries to satisfy your sweet tooth. Treat yourself to a slice of one or both at some of the area's favorite spots, like The Littlest Bakeshop in Tavares, A Wish or Two Ago in Eustis, Allyson A Bakeshop in Mount Dora, the Yalaha Bakery off FL-48, Miz Kathi's Sweetery in Wildwood, Sweet vs. Sinful in Clermont and more. Go ahead, treat yourself this month! 🥧



CALLING ALL CHILDREN: The City of Mount Dora announced the opening of an all-inclusive playground at **Gilbert Park**, 310 S. Tremain Street. The new playground, which opened November 8, replaces the old structure that faced safety concerns, ensuring a safer, bigger and more accessible space to enjoy outdoor playtime for all children ages 2-5 years old and 5-12 years old. According to city officials, approximately one-third of the funding for the project came from the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program.



MOVIN' ON UP: Officials with the City of Groveland and Rock Ventures recently broke ground on **Green Valley Commons** at the northwest corner of State Road 50 and Green Valley Blvd. The Commons will be home to Starbucks, Chipotle, McDonald's, Heartland Dental and Bridgestone!

PASSPORT TO MUSIC: Enjoy international music this spring with a "**Subscription to Destination Evenings**" at The Sharon Theatre in The Villages.

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PEOPLE

Dustin Lavine

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STORY: CINDY PETERSON × PHOTO: NICOLE HAMEL

VITAL STATS

- Executive Director of Melon Patch Players
- Former President of Leesburg Sunrise Rotary
- Chair of Lake County Arts and Cultural Advisory Committee
- Competitive tap dancer

I started performing: When I was 2 years old. I started as a dancer, because I literally walked into walls as a child and my mother wanted me to learn some grace. I moved to acting at age 16 and continued through college. I have been a performer in some way for most of my life.

My involvement with Melon Patch Players:

My mother actually got involved first while I was in Tallahassee doing my master's work. When I moved to the area, she encouraged me to audition for Cabaret, and I've been involved ever since. In 2016, I became the youngest and, at the time, longest-serving president.

My greatest accomplishments:

I think helping to grow the Melon Patch Players into not just a community theater, but a community participant, has been one of my recent achievements. I am also proud of helping to push us into a new era with our move to The Tropic in downtown Leesburg.

My 10-year vision: Ideally, I will still be the Executive Director of the Melon Patch Players. This has become my home, and it is



more than a job or career—it is my passion. Not many people can say they truly love what they do, so when your hobby becomes what you do for a living, that's pretty fulfilling.

One of the things I love most about my job:

It's the constant new challenges that keep me going. When I stepped into my role here, I stepped off the stage and behind the curtain, so to speak.

My mantra: Everything will be all right in the end, and if it is not all right, then it is not yet the end.

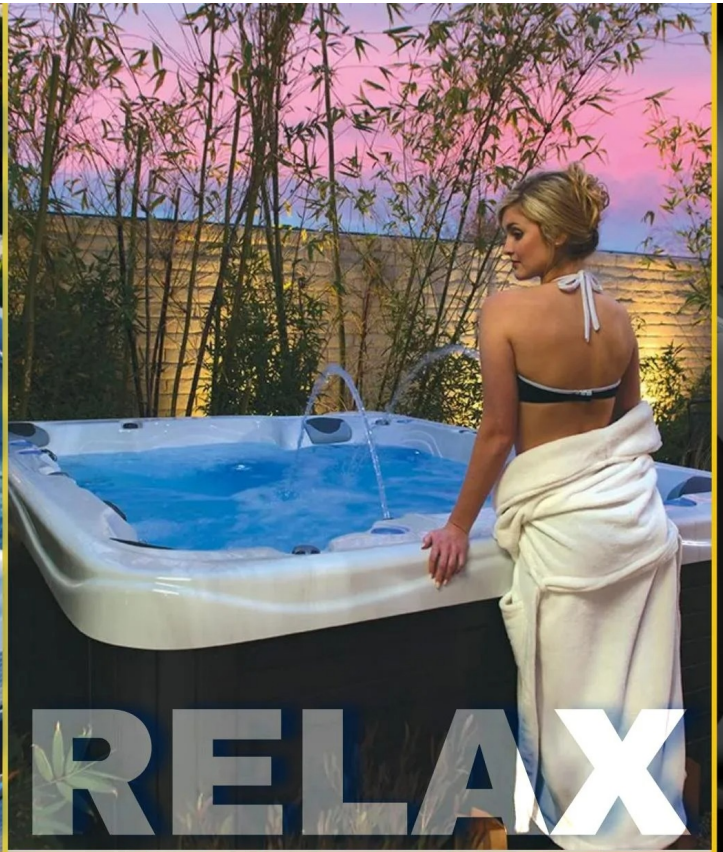
A fun fact: The fact that I was a competitive tapper surprises.

Lessons I've learned: Never accept that you can't do something. Life is infinitesimal, and we don't get to enjoy it as long as we may hope. Take that chance, trip, or adventure you've been eyeing. Fight to do what you love, against all odds. Most importantly, give all of the love and passion that you can to the world around you because if you are remembered for that, you will be remembered well. 🍷

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CINDY PETERSON



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PEOPLE

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STORY: CINDY PETERSON × PHOTO: NICOLE HAMEL

VITAL
STATS

- 17 years old
- SkillsUSA Secretary
- Air Force / Space Force Junior ROTC Cadet of the year
- AFJROTC Raider Team founding member
- Lake County Sheriff's Gold Star Award Recipient
- Mount Dora Police Department Freedom Award

My accomplishments: As the former Corps Commander of over 100 AFJROTC cadets, I led initiatives that included guiding 18 cadets to complete 100-plus service hours each and raising \$8,000 through volunteer efforts. I was honored as the 2023-2024 Air Force/Space Force Junior ROTC Cadet of the Year, ranking No. 1 out of 17,000 cadets. I revitalized the Drill Teams, led the Color Guard to a national competition and founded the local Kitty Hawk Air Society chapter. Additionally, I co-founded the Drones Team, training members in aerial skills and growing the team by 300%.

I want everyone to know: My success in Air Force Junior ROTC isn't an individual effort. I had an incredible support system of parents, teachers and peers supporting me every step of the journey. This achievement, although characterized as an individual award, is an award to our community's efforts and support to our nation's youth.

Future plans: Following high school, I plan on attending college and pursuing a career in the medical field as a registered physician (MD).

My greatest quality: My passion. Being passionate about something means you are willing to do whatever it takes to be the best. Passion is what drives people to make the change they want to see in this world.

A saying I live by:

"Full Send." Never do anything halfway; if you're going to do something, commit yourself 100%.

If I could choose one superpower:

It would be the ability to stop time. If I could stop time, I would be able to solve many world issues that experts are fighting against the clock to solve. Being able to stop time would also allow me to learn indefinitely and help more people than could have ever been possible.

My message to the world: Nobody can do it alone. Having a support network behind you all the time, no matter the scenario, is always going to work out better than if you were alone. If you want to be the best, don't do it alone. 🙌

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CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF GATOR HARLEY- DAVIDSON IN LEESBURG.

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

What began as a dream in Chicago has blossomed into a thriving cornerstone of Leesburg's motorcycle community. Gator Harley-Davidson, a family-run dealership, celebrates its 31-year anniversary this year, marking three decades of community, outstanding service and the unmistakable Harley spirit.

The story of Gator Harley-Davidson starts with the Malik family. John and Arlene Malik, along with their children, Janice, John Jr. and Steve, were seasoned entrepreneurs who ran Trend Automotive in Chicago, selling snowmobiles, ATVs, watercraft and more. However, declining snowfalls in the Midwest spurred John Jr. to suggest

a new venture—selling Harley-Davidson motorcycles in a different location such as Florida, Idaho or Colorado.

Thirty-one years ago, the Maliks took the leap, trading snowy Chicago for sunny Florida to pursue their bold vision. Starting with a small Harley-Davidson dealership, they grew their operation into a 70,000-square-foot community hub by 2005. That state-of-art facility they've called home for two decades now, is located on the same stretch of highway where it all began.

"It's amazing to see how much we've grown while staying true to our roots as a family-run business," says Rachel Malik-Durham, a third generation family member who grew up with the dealership.

MORE THAN A DEALERSHIP

Gator Harley-Davidson offers far more than motorcycles. Sure, visitors will find a huge selection of new and pre-owned Harley-Davidson bikes, but there's also a wide array of parts and a full-service repair and maintenance department staffed by factory-trained technicians. The dealership also features a large area chockful of licensed motorcycle apparel and gear that caters to enthusiasts and newcomers alike.

Financing options ensure accessibility for riders, with the Maliks' willingness to accept trade-ins adding an extra layer of flexibility. With that, the Maliks have seen it all, accepting boats, airplanes and even guns. "Anything we don't have to feed, we'll take it on trade," says Johnny Malik, who was also raised into the family business.

Beyond products and services, Gator Harley-Davidson hosts many events throughout the year. Two major Gator Bike Rallies—one aligning with Leesburg Bikefest in April and another



standalone event in November—serve as highlights. The dealership also organizes chili cook-offs, veteran support events, toy runs and even community-centered gatherings like car shows or "Trike or Treat" for Halloween. Their commitment to employees mirrors their family values, fostering loyalty among staff—many of whom have been with the company for years.

"It's more than just a dealership—it's a family," Rachel says.

A LEGACY OF GIVING BACK

The Maliks take pride in their strong community ties, hosting poker runs, fashion shows and events benefiting veterans—a key part of their clientele.

"Bikers are some of the most generous people you'll ever meet," Rachel says. "There's a misconception about the motorcycle community, but if you come to our events, you'll see how kind and giving everyone is. Everyone loves coming together for a good cause."

This community spirit extends to first-time riders and seasoned Harley veterans that have been loyal customers since the beginning buying multiple bikes, while others come simply to soak in the atmosphere.

"We get all types of people and we welcome all of them with open arms," Johnny says. "We're talking seasoned riders, new riders, veterans and even people who don't ride but are enthusiasts of the Harley Davidson brand or who just like the camaraderie of the motorcycle world."

LOOKING AHEAD

As Gator Harley-Davidson celebrates its 31-year anniversary in the community and 20-years at its current location, the family looks to the future with excitement. Ongoing training ensures the team stays sharp and plans include expanded events, deeper community partnership and continued support for veteran and local charities.

Additionally, the Maliks warmly invite a new generation of riders to embrace the Harley-Davidson spirit and make it their own. With an eye on the future, they aim to inspire younger enthusiasts to join the journey—riding boldly into a horizon full of adventure, freedom and community.

"We've come a long way, but there's always room to grow," says John Jr. "Whether it's hosting a Jeep event, adding to our lineup of community initiatives or welcoming new riders, we're always looking for ways to better serve our customers and our city."

31 YEARS STRONG

For the Malik family, Gator Harley-Davidson isn't just a business; it's a legacy. From its roots in Chicago to becoming a Leesburg staple, the dealership reflects decades of passion, perseverance and family values.

"It's been incredible to be part of this journey and we're here for the long haul," Co-owner John Jr. says, adding that when he and his sister, co-owner Janice Malik retire in the not so near future, he's not worried because younger family members like cousins Rachel and Johnny are set to take the reins.

"We're grateful for our customers, our team and this amazing community that's supported us every step of the way. Here's to the next 30 years!"

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Cheyenne Daves

OCCUPATION

Owner, The Humble Native, Wildwood

AGE

31

What I do: Not only do I manage the day-to-day, but I do all the human resources, ordering, marketing, networking, accounting and anything else that comes my way. **I'm passionate about running a locally-owned because:** The Humble Native is more than gifts and grilled cheese sandwiches; we are run by heart and family values. My goal is that The Humble Native will be known as a local spot for authenticity and southern hospitality. As a seventh-generation Sumter County resident, it's important to me to keep at least a sliver of our history intact. **Outside of work:** Whether we are traveling, out on the boat or just running errands, I love unscheduled time to relax with my husband and daughter. **My local mentor:** Hands down, Laci Demoss, owner of Magnolia Grace Beauty Co. She has been a friend, confidante and business coach throughout this entire process. **The best advice I've received:** "You just have to go for it, the money will come back but the opportunity won't." **Fun fact:** I am a huge advocate for professional women and am the Florida and Georgia pageant director for Universal Miss, a nationally recognized scholarship pageant system that values the growth of young women through professional development. Interview skills, confidence and public speaking are key to being successful in pageantry and as a professional. **Life after 40:** I hope to be a mentor to other young, small business owners looking for guidance and support as they navigate through their business endeavors.

Jeff Bell

OCCUPATION

Accredited Disability Representative, Bell's Disability Consultants

AGE

39

What I do: Manage a great staff and help clients fight for Social Security benefits they deserve. **How I got started:** My grandmother started this business back in the late 1980's. My father joined her in the '90's and I joined in a more official capacity in 2010. **I'm passionate about helping people get their benefits because:** It's been a part of the family legacy to serve and care for others and it's an honor to carry that on. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** Every time I get to share a smile or happy tears with a client who we successfully helped obtain benefits for. It never gets old. **When I'm not working:** I enjoy spending time with my beautiful wife and our four kids. I love all the adventures we get to go on. **My first job:** My first official full-time job was working in the Parks and Recreation Department for the City of Mount Dora. **My local mentor:** My father has always been my biggest encourager and mentor. **The best advice I've received:** Our



greatest fear should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don't really matter. **Fun fact:** I enjoy a good chick flick with my wife. **Life after 40:** Hopefully not fighting against whatever the Lord has in store for me. We can make our plans, but He determines our steps.



Aly Herman

OCCUPATION

Library Director, Town of Lady Lake

AGE

35

What I do: I manage and direct daily operations and activities of the Lady Lake Library, including staff supervision and the library's budget. **How I got started:** I began working as a student library page in 2006. I fell in love with

the job immediately and knew I wanted to pursue a career in the library field. **I'm passionate about library services because:** While many think our job is just about checking out books, we actually provide a wide range of services to the community and are here to listen to our patrons. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** Applying for a \$1 million county impact fee grant and being awarded it. The Lady Lake Library expansion project will enlarge the youth library area by almost 70%. **When I'm not working and helping patrons:** I enjoy spending time with my family, going to Disney, volunteering for Pug Rescue of Florida and thrifting. **My local mentor:** I have learned a lot from Lady Lake Town Manager Bill Lawrence's leadership skills, and he has taught me how important communication is. **The best advice I've received:** Never give up on something you really want. It's difficult to wait, but even more difficult to regret. **Fun fact:** Since undergoing weight loss surgery in May 2023, I've lost 150 pounds, and I welcomed a baby in July 2024. This journey has not only transformed my life but has also made me a better person and a positive role model for my children.



Trey Siwek

OCCUPATION

Multimedia and Sales Growth Management,
Premier Kitchen and Bath, Fruitland Park

AGE

39

What I do: Digital Marketing, lead generation and sales growth.

How I got started: I studied audio engineering and music production straight out of high school and quickly learned that I needed to know a little bit of every aspect of the entertainment industry to keep up. Photo and video editing, website creation, social media management, and SEO management are all tools I've picked up along my journey. I graduated from Audio Recording Technology Institute in Orlando in May of 2005. Since then, I've

been a music producer, advertiser, podcaster, streamer, editor, YouTuber, videographer and website developer. I've been at Premier Kitchen and Bath (the family business) since July 2023. In that time, we've seen a 40% increase in sales and 20% increase in lead generation, so something is working. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** Having my podcast highlighted by Orlando Weekly only two years in. **When I'm not working:** I like to cook. It's therapeutic, delicious and comes easily. **My local mentor:** My

community. There's knowledge to be absorbed from most people. If you learn to always listen and carry grains of salt with you, you'll find your way.

Fun fact: I once dressed as Paula Deen in drag for a breast cancer charity. My good friend James was a giant stick of butter. Good times were had by all. **Life after 40:** My latest adventure has been comedy and writing. Not sure where it'll lead me, but if I'm ever able to make a living from my creativity, it would be like living a dream.

Alec C. Chessari

OCCUPATION

Owner, Chessari Sod Services & Landscape LLC, The Villages

AGE

28

What I do: As a business owner, I wear many hats. I focus on estimates, design, sales and daily problem-solving. I also have good, experienced people working for me in their fields to help collaborate with me. **How I got started:**

I started working with my father in high school, laying sod. After graduating from FSU with a bachelor's in sports communications, I felt the outdoors calling me back and decided to start my own business in 2018. **I'm passionate about landscaping and sod services because:** I love being outside and helping people improve all aspects of their home to enjoy it more. **When I'm not working:** I have two true passions: being with my family, including my beautiful wife, who is my rock, and playing



golf. **My local mentor:** My mom has always had my back and is still the one I call when I need advice or to work through things. **The best advice I've received:** Live out your dream or you will be working for someone and helping them live theirs. **Life after 40:** I would like to get involved in local community leadership and explore the possibility of eventually moving towards local politics. I'd like to help my community grow for the good of all people.



Damaris Martinez

OCCUPATION

Owner, Express Tax Services, LLC, Clermont

AGE

39

What I do: I'm an IRS approved tax preparer and tax advisor. I file returns and provide strategic tax planning advice to help clients minimize future tax liabilities, navigate complex tax regulations and make informed financial decisions. I also offer guidance on tax-efficient investments, retirement planning and estate issues and represent clients during audits and disputes, making sure they stay compliant and reduce potential penalties. **How I got started:** In 2007, while working in an immigration office as a secretary, a CPA encouraged me to get my certification and 10 years later I started my tax firm. **I'm passionate about my job because:** It allows me to make a difference in people's financial well-being. I love navigating complex tax laws to help clients save money, plan for their futures and achieve financial goals, whether it's helping a small business grow or ensuring a family secures their financial legacy. The dynamic nature of tax laws keeps me constantly learning and evolving, which fuels my passion for finding the best solutions for my clients. **When I'm not working:** I'm spending time outdoors and quality time with my beautiful family. **My local mentor:** Milton Thompson, CPA, because he's always given me a hand and offered me advice. **The best advice I've received:** God opens and closes doors because he knows what we need and to be thankful in all circumstances. **Life after 40:** With God's help and guidance, I'll hopefully have a couple of rental properties, own a small farm and grow my business.



Austin White

OCCUPATION

Executive Assistant, The T&D Family of Companies, Wildwood; Treasurer of the Sumter Fair Association; Owner/CEO of Nonnie's Boutique, Wildwood

AGE

28

What I do: I manage all financial operations for our supplies division, oversee customer relations and order processing. Additionally, I handle much of our community outreach, collaborating directly with our CEO to ensure that our community receives the support and resources it needs. **I'm passionate about what I do because:** This role pushes me every day to be my very best! It allows me to utilize my organizational and communication skills to support our company's growth and impact. Additionally, co-founding two other businesses, engaging with and serving nonprofit organizations aligns with my commitment to community and personal development. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** Partnering with my mother last year to purchase a historic building in downtown Wildwood where my grandmother cut hair for over 30 years. We bought this property and opened Nonnie's Boutique to honor her! **Fun fact:** I have a deep love for singing and recently joined the choir at my church. I have embraced this passion to fulfill what I believe God has called me to do. **Life after 40:** In the future, I envision myself as an impactful business leader dedicated to giving back to the community. One of my key goals for the next decade is to establish a nonprofit organization that brings faith, hope and love to those most in need, particularly children, individuals with special needs and the homeless.



Francheska Sabatini

OCCUPATION

Attorney, Sabatini Law Firm P.A., Mount Dora

AGE

37

What I do: I primarily handle the real estate closing portion of our practice, so I work with buyers, sellers and realtors to facilitate real estate transactions. **How I got started:** I come from a family of lawyers, so it was no surprise when I decided to go to law school. I graduated law school and passed the bar exam in 2012. **I'm passionate about practicing law because:** I love facilitating real estate closings - everybody is happy at the closing table! **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** Building a law practice with my husband Anthony, which allows me the flexibility to be present for our daughter while still maintaining a thriving career. **When I'm not working:** I enjoy trying new restaurants and traveling. **My local mentors:** I learned a lot at the law firm where I previously worked, Stone and Gerken, PA. They are great attorneys and great people. **The best advice I've received:** My mom has always encouraged me to start my own law practice. She knows how important it is to have a work/life balance that allows me to be a mom first. **Fun fact:** Many people are surprised to learn that Spanish is my first language. I was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. **Life after 40:** I see myself right here in Lake County, continuing to grow our law practice and our family.

Brianna McLees

OCCUPATION

South Lake Chamber of Commerce Marketing & Programs Director

AGE

23

What I do: I serve as the Chamber's primary source of information related to programs, events and member services. **How I got started:** After returning to Clermont from Florida State University, I faced a surprising realization: I knew more people in Tallahassee than home. After noticing how much Clermont had evolved, I felt a strong urge to reconnect with my growing community. With perfect timing, a job opportunity opened at the South Lake Chamber, and after meeting the team, I was overwhelmed with excitement. **I'm passionate about what I do because:** Our Chamber events create networking opportunities and foster connections within the community. It's rewarding to see local businesses thrive from their participation in the organization. **Outside of work:** I love playing bingo with my grandfather and aunt on Tuesdays. **My local mentors:** Jamie and Dustin Lowe, owners of Lake Catherine Farms, are leaders I deeply admire. Their work ethic and passion



for their community has taught me so much over the years. **The best advice I've received:** "Let go and let God."

This quote has helped me shift my mindset from a place of anxiety to one of trust and faith in God's plan for me. **Life after 40:** I don't know where my life will take me, but I want to stay true to my heart and surround myself with uplifting people. If my future continues to be as fulfilling as it is now, I see myself being a very happy 40+ year old person.

Joel Padilla

OCCUPATION

Owner and President, Chef and Educator at The Culinary Lab and Platinum Chefs Empingao, Leesburg

AGE

40

What I do: I manage all of the programs, culinary training and concept creation. **How I got started:** My mother introduced me to the culinary world when I was 8 as I worked in the kitchen with her. I started professionally in 2007. **I'm passionate about cooking and teaching because:** Watching people enjoy the dishes I create and them wanting to learn the techniques that it took to create is very satisfying. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** Becoming a mentor on the James Beard Foundation Board. **When I'm outside the kitchen:** I love to garden with my daughter, Aliyah. **My first job:** I worked at Chuck E. Cheese. **My local mentor:** I have had many mentors, but the one I look up to the most is my mother, Marianela Padilla. **The best advice I've received:** There is no such thing as becoming a master of anything. Keep learning! **Fun fact:** I'm a self-taught beekeeper and I have a pet pig named Samantha Pepa Bacon Pig. **Life after 40:** After 40 all I see is 40! I genuinely hope to continue to grow as a chef and continue exploring all the amazing things the culinary world has to offer.



Dr. Terri Pfister Soos

OCCUPATION

Educator, Principal at Seminole Springs Elementary, Eustis

AGE

37

I am passionate about being a principal because: I believe that education is vital to providing hope for our future. **My biggest professional accomplishment:** As a proud principal in Lake County schools, I have greater capacity to serve the students, teachers, staff and families in our greater community. **When I'm not on campus:** I love spending time with family and friends, traveling, sipping on a good cup of coffee and enjoying our beautiful state while walking, running or kayaking. **My local mentors:** Our superintendent, my regional director and my fellow principals set a strong example of leading with heart and keeping students at the center of every decision. **The best advice I've received:** My dad said, "It doesn't matter where you start, it's where you finish." **Fun fact:** I think most people are surprised that I have a bit of an adventurous side and love a good challenge! Whether it be stepping completely out of my comfort zone and setting out to win the Mirror Ball Trophy at Stepping Out for Education, running in a marathon, jumping out of a plane or planning a trip to somewhere new on a whim – sign me up! **Life after 40:** I love learning, so I wouldn't rule out going back to school eventually for another degree or certification. But I see myself continuing to work in Lake County Schools at the school or district level until I retire.



Jesse Ernst

OCCUPATION

Founder/Owner, Speaker and Coach, Ernst Financial Solutions, LLC

AGE

36

What I do: I am CEO—"Chief Everything Officer." **How I got started:** I was in a career transition phase a few years back, and in 2020, the opportunity presented itself to go through Dave Ramsey's Financial Coach Master Training and get my coaching certification. Things blossomed from there. **I'm passionate about finances because:** The opportunity to launch my own coaching practice, where I can serve my clients in the way I'm most passionate about, fills me with excitement. To see lives

change and even generational wealth shift as a result inspires me to show up and serve my clients every day. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** Guiding my clients to pay off over \$3 million of debt in the last four years! **When I'm not working on people's finances:** I enjoy spending time with my wife and daughter and I love to travel! **My first job:** I was in construction at a truss factory. **My local mentor:** My wife, Claire, who owns Claire's Creperie in Mount Dora, always inspires me. She's why I felt the confidence to launch my business. **The best advice I've received:** Delayed gratification is not denied gratification. **Fun fact:** I grew up in Mexico and read, write and speak Spanish fluently. **Life after 40:** Still serving clients face-to-face, doing more public speaking and working with larger companies toward financial freedom, thereby maximizing my company's impact.

Christina Arthur

OCCUPATION

Vice President Business Strategy of Drivosity (company headquarters in Lake County) and CayDon Associates; Owner of HitFit Clermont.

AGE

31

What I do: At Drivosity, I manage branding and global strategic partnerships for a last mile delivery SaaS company, identifying, building and negotiating relationships both domestically and internationally to further business and technical integrations.

My biggest professional accomplishment so far: In 2020, I wanted to recognize drivers on Drivosity's platform maintaining the highest standard of safety on the roads. These drivers were working to keep our communities—nationally and locally—safe. I pitched and developed DrivosityCertified, and through collaboration with our operations, technical teams and company founders, DrivosityCertified Safe Drivers and the DrivosityCertified program was established as a USPTO official certification for safe driving. **When not working:** I'm a competitive rower, strongman athlete and strength and conditioning coach. Any free time is spent training myself or training others at my gym or at the Lake County Rowing Association's (LCRA) boathouse in Clermont. **My local mentor:** LCRA Captain Anne Eaddy, a dear friend, is one of the strongest people I know and has taught me perseverance by pure example. **The best advice I've received:** "Fail fast." I live by that daily. In business, failure is inevitable, but give everything you've got to an endeavor, be savvy enough to know if it's working and know when it's time to move on to new opportunities. **Fun fact:** I was once an MMA fighter. I still train in Brazilian jiu jitsu but spend most of my martial arts time coaching self-defense classes.

Cindy Peterson



Alise Morris

OCCUPATION

Chief Business Officer, LifeStream Behavioral Center, Leesburg

AGE

30

What I do: I'm responsible for the agency call center, medical records, marketing and development teams, community relations and serving on our executive council. **How I got started:** Prior to my tenure as associate vice president of marketing and development at LifeStream, I worked with our family business, Ernie Morris Enterprises. **I'm passionate about LifeStream because:** The individuals we serve and the incredible colleagues I work alongside are incredible. **My biggest professional accomplishment:** Building a team I'm proud of as well as revitalizing our

OCCUPATION

Digital Media Editor of Style Magazine, Video Producer, Journalist, Photographer

AGE

37

What I do: I'm an independent digital media specialist working on projects in photography, videography, journalism, video editing, graphic design, and even radio. I also produce videos for Beacon College's "A World of Difference" on PBS. **Why I love Journalism:** I enjoy sharing positive, inspiring stories to counter the misinformation and negativity in the world. **My biggest accomplishment:** Our team for "A World of Difference" has won Telly and Anthem awards, but overcoming personal challenges and supporting my son is my greatest personal achievement. **When I'm not working:** My husband and I love traveling and discovering new places. I'm still taking photos, mostly of wildlife. **My first job:** I worked at my family's printing company, SPACE Printing, from a young age. When I was around 8, I was once fired by my dad for complaining and refusing to do my job, but begged to come back. I've been a hard worker ever since. **My mentor:** I've followed in my family's footsteps. My grandfather was in the newspaper business, and my parents always worked multiple jobs, doing whatever it took to provide. **Best advice:** Don't listen to the naysayers. **Fun fact:** I can spend an hour photographing squirrels. **Life after 40:** I want to keep growing in my career and raise my son to be a good man.

marketing and community partnership.

When I'm not in the office: I like to spend time with my beautiful niece, Harper, and handsome nephew, Jett. I also coach youth volleyball at American Athletic Club. **My local mentor:** As cliché as it sounds, my dad, Tim Morris. I joke about how many times a week someone calls me "little Timmy," but it honestly is the greatest compliment. **The best advice I have received:** Our current CEO, Rick Hankey, told me that in life, be ready to play chess, not checkers. It's a great reminder to think big, make strategic plans and recognize the impact my choices have. **Fun fact:** I really enjoy painting. I have a few of my pieces in my office. **Life after 40:** Wherever God leads me I suppose, but I'm sure hoping it looks a lot like another 30+ years alongside my LifeStream team. Also I hope to do a lot of traveling.



Elizabeth Johnson

OCCUPATION

Executive Director, Education Foundation of Lake County (EFLC)

AGE

35

What I do: I oversee the organization's operations and serve as the primary liaison between the EFLC Board of Directors, Lake County Public Schools, Take Stock in Children and the community. I collaborate with an awesome team to host programs, raise funds and build partnerships that support Lake County students and teachers. **How I got started:** Entering college, I originally thought I wanted to work in marketing, but having an on-campus job in one of the resource departments quickly opened my eyes to how education can be a catalyst for change. **I'm passionate about The Education Foundation because:** I am enthusiastic about empowering others to reach their fullest potential. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** In 2021, I earned my doctorate in educational leadership with an emphasis in K-12. It is exciting to see my research published and to present the findings at national conferences. **When I'm not working:** The beach is one of my favorite places but spending time outside walking with my husband and our dog is the best part of my day. **My local mentor:** Chuck Johnson. I'm always appreciative when he'll share his insight or stories of Lake County. **The best advice I've received:** Don't be afraid of what you don't know. Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't - you're right." Grit, resiliency and having an open mind can go a long way in life. **Fun fact:** I'm a sucker for rewatching the Jurassic Park movie series.



Lindsey Walsh

OCCUPATION

**Optometric Physician (Optometrist),
Magruder Laser Vision**

AGE

35

How I got started: I've wanted to be a doctor since I was a child. I had terrible eyesight growing up, so I visited the optometrist twice a year. I noticed that the staff was always happy and upbeat. At 21, I decided to go to UCF for premed. In 2014 I was accepted into optometry school in Fort Lauderdale and moved down south for four years. I started practicing primary eye care in 2018 and now I focus on refractive cataract surgery and LASIK. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** In 2023 and 2024, I was voted 'Best of the Best' Optometrist in Lake and Sumter Counties. **When I'm not working on improving peoples' vision:** I love my Peloton, and I enjoy going to Disney with my

two small children: Audrey, 5, and Everett, 1. **My local mentor:** Pastor Justin Miller of Real Life Christian Church. It's easy to learn more about Christianity, God, and strengthen your faith in Jesus through him. **The best advice I've received:** "Never give up on a dream just because of the time it will take to accomplish it. The time will pass anyway." **Fun fact:** I am a huge Outlander fan. Also, I first met my husband, Michael Walsh, when I was 2 years old, and he was 3. **Life after 40:** I will continue to serve and glorify God, raise my sweet family and be present in the lives of my loved ones. I will also continue to grow professionally... and I think I will expand my shoe collection while I'm at it.



Eric Lamoreaux

OCCUPATION

**Sergeant,
Leesburg Police
Department (LPD)**

AGE

35

What I do: I supervise personnel, maintain interaction with the public and oversee patrol functions, providing oversight, guidance and structure for patrol officers.

How I got started: I started a family very young and wanted a career that would help me serve a greater purpose and make my daughters proud. I joined the LPD in 2012.

I'm passionate about law enforcement because: You see people during some of the worst times of their lives. It can be hard, but it allows you to pour into people and have an impact. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** In my second year, I responded to a well-being check. An elderly woman had lost her husband—a military veteran—and was distraught. She told me about the 50 years she spent with him and didn't know how to proceed with life on her own. She was hurting, so I sat with her for a long time. I also replaced a tattered flag her husband would raise and lower each day. She later wrote me later saying how much our time together meant. She lives in New York with her relatives now and we still write to each other. **My local mentor:** Wayne Cockcroft. He worked in Lake County Schools for years. He's honest, hardworking and his faith and family are his main priorities. Now retired, he's living life to the fullest. I hope to serve my family and others half as well as he has. **Fun fact:** I am a little obsessed with lineage and family history. The biggest item on my bucket list is to go to France and explore the village where my family was originally from.



Justin Allender

OCCUPATION
Commercial Loan Officer, First
National Bank of Mount Dora

AGE
37

What I do: I help Lake County business owners finance their land, building and equipment. **How I got started:** I started off as a bank teller in 2008 during my time at Florida State. I took a break to get my MBA, but 2025 will be my 15th year in Banking. **Commercial banking is my passion because:** Whether it's ground-up construction or just helping someone switch from renting to owning, it's fun to see the tangible

ways I can play a part in a business's success. **My biggest professional achievement:** I'm proud to have completed a two-year values-based banking leadership academy with MIT's CoLab in 2016. I got to explore how banking can make communities stronger when focused on people and not just profit. Over the two years I got to visit Germany, France, Bolivia and had my capstone in Boston with colleagues from banks from around

the world. **My first job:** I started as a stock boy at JC Penney, then I was put on a cash register on Black Friday and stayed there. **Fun fact:** One of my guilty pleasures is reality TV. Big Brother, Traitors and Selling Sunset come to mind. **Life after 40:** I hope to eventually combine the quirks of mine into a bank executive-level role so I can continue the legacy of community banking, making our towns stronger and creating better places to live.



Tasia Drayton

OCCUPATION

**Founder of
Compassionate
Connections
Home Care &
Compassionate
Livescan and Notary**

AGE

31

How I got started: My passion for elder care began when my grandmother suffered a stroke during my 8th grade summer. I spent countless hours in rehab facilities, accompanying her through physical therapy. This experience left a profound impact on me, and I found myself drawn to helping the elderly. Initially, I pursued a career in physical therapy, but transitioned to becoming a CNA in 2013. I founded my company in 2017. **I am passionate about home health care because:** I quickly realized the profound difference small acts of care and attention can make in someone's life. **When I'm not working:** My family and I love playing instruments together – piano, guitar, drums and singing. Cooking is another big passion of mine, and I enjoy creating food content. **The best advice I've ever received:** "Focus on your own path. Don't get distracted by what others are doing. Perfect what you have, and always choose quality over quantity." **Fun fact:** I'm an introvert with social anxiety – something people rarely believe. **Life after 40:** I plan to have more free time to travel with my husband and children, creating unforgettable family memories. Professionally, I envision at least 15 franchised locations, expanding our services to include skilled care. The revenue will help fund my next endeavor: real estate investing. I aim to open independent and assisted living facilities to offer various levels of care for clients as their needs evolve and start a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the elderly and disabled.

Tyler Adams

OCCUPATION

**Realtor with
Arrowsmith Realty,
Insurance Agent
with J Meyers
Insurance Agency**

AGE

24

What I do: In the world of real estate, I am an Accredited Buyers Representative (ABR). I primarily focus on first-time homebuyers, assisting them with what could be their largest investment. On the insurance side, I focus on assisting business owners when it comes to protecting their investments and businesses. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** I have become a multi-million-dollar producer for the last three of the five years I've been in real estate. **My local mentor:** I am very blessed to have more than one mentor. However, I wanted to point out one: Steve McDonald – CEO at the Realtors Association of Lake & Sumter Counties. As Steve and I have gotten to know each other, I have learned from him that patience, and the ability to listen, is one of the most important things one can do in their career. He has been such a great Association Executive, and I am truly grateful to learn from him. **The best advice I've ever received:** If you do everything you can to be a good neighbor, friend, and family member, then it doesn't matter what others think. **Fun fact:** The first time I ever got on an airplane was when I went skydiving and jumped out of it. I say this because although I am very reserved and focus on business, I'm also very adventurous and love to try new things. **Life after 40:** I see myself being a great boss/CEO, but even more importantly, a great friend, husband, and one day, dad.



Jeff Knittel

OCCUPATION

**Oral and Maxillofacial
Surgeon, Florida Oral
and Maxillofacial
Surgery of
Mount Dora**

AGE

38

What I do: At my office I frequently perform complex dental extractions (including wisdom teeth), bone grafts, place dental implants and treat benign pathology



of the jaws. **I'm passionate about oral surgery because:** I have the ability to give people their confidence back through a new and improved smile, help them return to function after years of difficulty eating, or just help someone get out of pain if they have an infection. I understand most people do not look forward to going to a dentist or surgeon's office, but I enjoy working with them and doing what I can to make them comfortable and ensure a positive experience. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** We recently completed a renovation of a new office, and it has been a very exciting time using our new space and treating patients with the most up-to-date equipment and technology. **When I'm not working:** I spend most of my spare time with my beautiful wife and four young boys. I help with their baseball teams, and I get so much out of being involved and coaching them and their friends. **The best advice I've received:** Always be persistent and never give up. You haven't failed until you've stopped trying. **Fun fact:** I played guitar in a rock band in college. We even recorded an album with a small, local record label and toured the East Coast one summer. I still fiddle with my guitar when I have some free time.



Matthew S. Hackler

OCCUPATION

Co-Founder and
Financial Advisor for
Edgewater Family
Wealth, Mount Dora

AGE

40

What I do: My main responsibilities include financial and retirement planning as well as investment management. **I'm passionate about my job because:** We help normal, everyday people figure out how to go from accumulating assets while they are working to figuring out how to start using what they've built throughout their life. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** Co-founding Edgewater Family Wealth in Mount Dora. There is a whole new level unlocked when you become an entrepreneur. It's more risk, but to build something is an amazing feeling. **When not advising my clients:** I'm usually at Disney with my wife and two daughters, cooking and smoking meats, in my shop working on a guitar or car or just working out. **My first job:** The membership desk of the Downtown Orlando YMCA. **My local mentor:** Without naming names, because I'm sure I'll forget someone, there have been several senior leaders who've taken me under their wings and taught me invaluable lessons. I've also had several pastors whom I greatly admire. **The best advice I've received:** Mistakes are not the problem, it's how they are handled and the lessons learned for next time that really matter. **Fun fact:** I was a music director for a local church for several years. **Life after 40:** To continue building Edgewater Family Wealth to better serve our clients and community.



Melissa Denham

OCCUPATION

Nurse, Dementia
Care Specialist,
The Villages Health

AGE

39

What I do: I manage The Villages Health Dementia Care Coordination Program, which I created and piloted in Fall 2017. **How I got started:** I have always been drawn to helping older adults, even back when I was in grade school helping the elders in church. **I'm passionate about dementia care because:** When I was little, I watched my Gramma take care of my Papa who had dementia and Parkinson's Disease. My Gramma was the strongest woman I've ever known. I watched her do everything without ever complaining or hesitating. That stuck with me growing up and is still a part of why I do what I do. **My biggest professional accomplishment:** Creating a program from scratch that now is available to the community to make their dementia journey a bit easier. **When I'm not coordinating care:** I enjoy spending time with my husband, Joe, and two boys, Dalton and Ryder. We enjoy fishing, boating and hunting. We are on the water almost every weekend. **My first job:** My very first job was at a local surgery center managing their mail. **The best advice I've received:** To make sure I balance my home and work life. **Fun fact:** I grew up in a hunting family with my dad hunting hogs and then when I met Joe in high school and we started dating, my hunting experiences took off.



Dr. Ebony Brown Milson

OCCUPATION

Physician

What I do: As a physician, I have many responsibilities, the first of which is my responsibility to diagnose and treat a wide range of medical conditions. **How I got started:** Both of my parents are in the medical field and being around medicine my entire life, it felt like a natural path to take. **I'm passionate about being a physician because:** I love helping my patients and making a positive difference in their lives. I am an advocate of preventive medicine and love educating patients about their health.

What I do outside the hospital: I love to travel with my husband, Akai, and we love walking our Staffordshire Bull Terrier, Rocsi. **My local mentor:** My mom, Denise Brown. She is a member of the Central Florida Black Nurses Association and a CRNA. She is also someone I aspire to be like in my life. **The best advice I've received:** "Comparison is the thief of joy." I believe it is important not to compare yourself to others. You can only be the best version of you and there is only one you in the entire world, so know you are divinely special. **Fun fact:** I'm obsessed with Game of Thrones, Dune, Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter. **Life after 40:** In the future, I see myself becoming a mother biologically and through adoption. Also, I'd like to help shape Central Florida's future health care professionals by being a mentor.

Fred Griffin, Jr.

OCCUPATION

Owner of Touching Heart's Academy & Adult Day Training, Provider with the State of Florida

AGE

37

What I do: As the owner, I oversee daily operations. **How I got started:** I chose my career path because of my personal experience caring for my father who suffers from mental illness. It led me to pursue a career in human services, as I have seen the pressing need for this kind of support firsthand. In 2007 I became an administrator for Florida's largest human services facility for individuals with disabilities. In 2013, I started my own residential group home and adult day training

program. **My passion for community is driven by:** Personal experiences and values that align with the importance of caring for and uplifting others who cannot help themselves. **My biggest professional accomplishment:** My volunteerism and community activism has brought recognition on various occasions. **My local mentor:** My pastor, Apostle Dannie Williams. **The best advice I've received:** Remain prayerful, faithful and humble in everything

you do. **Fun fact:** I'm a big kid at heart. I love pranking my friends and family. Laughter is good for you, so I enjoy seeing smiles on the faces of others.

Life after 40: I plan to continue to serve my community with various organizations, travel more and help others continue to live out their full potential. I also see myself as a U.S. Congressman.



Jen Abston

OCCUPATION

**Artist,
Entrepreneur and
Owner at Fab Faces
Entertainment**

AGE

39

What I do: Face painting, balloon twisting, airbrush art, caricatures, magic and more! You might even see me face-painting at community gatherings and parties around town. **How I got started:** I started face painting at my church and children's school to supplement my income. With my background in early childhood education and love for the arts, I found my passion in face painting, which inspired me to launch Fab Faces Entertainment. **I'm**

passionate about making magic because: I absolutely love spreading joy and creating moments that will last a lifetime through arts and entertainment. **My biggest professional accomplishment:** Expanding my business beyond face-painting. This has allowed me to connect and collaborate with others in my community on a much larger scale. **When I'm not painting faces:** I love to spend time with family, go to the beach, theme parks and travel to places I haven't been to yet! **My local mentors:** Pastor Dawn Carter and Mo Mydlo. These women have been spiritual sisters to me, great encouragers, and examples of what it looks like to live a God-honoring life. **The best advice I have ever received:** "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding," Proverbs 3:5. **Fun fact:** I am also the director of admissions at First Academy-Leesburg. **Life after 40:** After 40, I see my business continuing to grow and expand to serve even more people.



Danielle Stroud

OCCUPATION

**Nonprofit Executive,
President and CEO of
Habitat for Humanity
of Lake-Sumter**

AGE

38

What I do: Strategic leadership, developing organizational culture, high-level financial oversight, land development and relationship-building in support of our fund development and advocacy efforts. **How I got started:** I became familiar with the nonprofit sector as an AmeriCorps member working for the Southwest Conservation Corps, a nonprofit organization based out of Tucson, Arizona. **I'm passionate about Habitat for Humanity because:** Knowing that I've had a chance to invest in someone's life and help them achieve a dream that they felt was out of reach is highly satisfying. **My biggest professional accomplishment:** Growing Habitat's philanthropic support by 280% since joining the team in 2015. **When I'm not helping people into homes:** I love being active and traveling, and many times I combine the two. My next big active travel adventure will be to summit Kilimanjaro with my husband, Chase, for



my 40th birthday. **My local mentor:** Felix Ramirez, who recently passed, was a friend and champion of mine since joining Habitat in 2015. He believed in me, cheered me on and was a shining example of what it meant to be a force for good. **Fun fact:** At a whopping 5'2", I had a strong high school career in both volleyball and basketball. **Life after 40:** Professionally, I don't envision leaving Habitat anytime soon. My work here has only just begun.



Philip Pollen

OCCUPATION

**Corporal & Mental
Health Officer
with the Clermont
Police Department**

AGE

38

What I do: I work in the mobile crisis unit and am the team leader for the hostage negotiations team. **I'm passionate about law enforcement because:** People in law enforcement are problem-solvers and I like to solve problems. Being able to fully conceptualize the issue and implement a plan to improve someone's life is very fulfilling to me. **In my personal time:** I play Dungeons and Dragons twice a week with my wife and a group of friends we made throughout the community. As part of this, I 3D print and paint figures as well as write stories for characters. When I'm not playing or planning D&D, I'm writing my book, Critical Hits: Rolling Through Life with Mindfulness and Purpose. **My local mentor:** Besides my actual therapist, who helps shape who I am, I'd have to say I look up to the people who are in a tougher spot than me. **The best advice I have received:** I wasn't directly given this advice but rather something I've learned to do from watching people I respect. I treat people based on the content of my character, not theirs. This forces me to remain true to myself and not let others influence what kind of person I am. **Fun fact:** Despite my whole job depending on me to communicate, I am very introverted and comfortable with silence. I find silence to be healing. **Life after 40:** I'm a lifelong learner. I plan on collecting more degrees and building onto what I've created in law enforcement.

Ryan Peterson

OCCUPATION

Software Developer,
REDLattice Inc.,
Photographer,
Videographer

AGE

37

What I do: Primarily, I work as a software developer for REDLattice, Inc. I am also a videographer for Beacon College's "A World of Difference" on PBS. **How I got started:** I began working in lawn maintenance and as a handyman before injuring my back. I was told I needed to get out of the industry because of it, so I accepted an intern position at a data center and worked my way up the ladder to becoming a network engineer. With everything going automated, I decided to transition into software development. **What makes me passionate about software development:** I enjoy the puzzle aspect and problem solving it takes. **When I'm not working:** In the little bit of spare time that I have, I enjoy gaming, traveling, working out, hiking and photography. **My first job:** Reptile breeding; ball pythons to be exact. **My mentor:** Honestly, the only reason I am where I am in life is because God has gotten me here. **The best advice I ever received:** "If you have time, you don't have money. If you have money, you don't have time." **Fun Fact:** I sing tenor in The Messiah every year.

Patrick Scheidler

OCCUPATION

Owner,
Savage Roofing

AGE

37

What I do: I supervise the day-to-day, solve job site complications and hire team members. I also do the financial planning and marketing, plus build company policies and procedures. **How I got started:** I'm a second-generation construction worker and began working in the field when I was 12 years old. **I'm passionate about roofing because:** I love solving problems, serving the community and creating generational opportunities for my son and beyond. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** After a year, I had been grinding so hard that I didn't have a chance to stop and smell the roses. I felt so grateful, validated and proud of my team for helping achieve it. **When I'm not fixing roofs or problems:** I like to hunt, fish and be on the water, but most people don't know I actually stream live gaming at night. **My local mentors:** I would have to mention my mom for her resilience, Andy Dixon for passing on the roofing knowledge and my Uncle Lee for giving me the lion instincts and ability to see three steps ahead. **The best advice I've received:** Knowledge is power. **Fun fact:** Most people wouldn't know that I enjoy video gaming. **Life after 40:** Once I reach the point of retirement, I hope to mentor small business owners and help them grow their businesses. I enjoy helping and seeing people reach their potential.



Sarah Herrick

OCCUPATION

Program Director,
Mount Dora Community
Trust (MDCT)

AGE

33

I'm passionate about the Mount Dora Community Trust because: People suffer every single day for a multitude of ongoing problems. I want to use my life to help make changes in a positive way and support those who are underserved. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** I would say it was finishing my master's degree while having three children under the age of 6 and a full-time job. It was a long and hard three years with a lot of late nights and early mornings. My biggest accomplishment in my job role with MDCT is our Giving Week initiative. I went to a National Conference on Philanthropy many years ago and learned about a match day contest for Giving Tuesday held by another foundation. I decided I wanted to implement that here in Lake County. The contest is now in its fifth year, and to date we have given \$1.3 million to 45 different nonprofits. **My local mentor:** I really look up to Crissy Stile. I came to know her well when she joined MDCT's board as the Mayor of Mount Dora. **Fun fact:** I'm a big Swiftie and attended the Eras Tour concert in Miami on October 19, 2024! **Life after 40:** I hope to open my own consulting business in the philanthropic sector to assist other leaders and champions build impactful programs plus continuing with the MDCT and growing it even further. Also, relaxing with my husband in our (someday) forever home while sipping coffee and watching our babies grow into beautiful kind humans!



Stephen Herron

OCCUPATION
Vice President and foamologist at Florida Foam Factory

AGE
30

What I do: I am in charge of marketing and growing the business through various channels, social media, networking and community outreach. **How I got started:** I started this company in 2020 because of the global pandemic. When communities started reopening, we used foam parties to bring people back together.

I'm passionate about parties because: I get to entertain people in such a unique and creative way, which is something I have always felt I was born to do. Foam and bubbles always spark the biggest smiles on kids of all ages, pets too! **When I'm not working:** I am doing some sort of magic trick, something I started when I was 10. I enjoy performing for my friends and being able to use magic as an ice breaker in any situation. Anyone who knows me knows I always have a deck of cards in my pocket. **My local mentor:** My business partner, Shane. He helped me get the business started and pushed me to finally leave my day job to take Florida Foam Factory to a whole new level and think outside the box.

Zachary Varnadore

OCCUPATION
VP of Operations, Trinity Company

AGE
27

What I do: I'm in charge of managing daily operations, overseeing all crews and meeting with clients. **How I got started:** Blake Merrill, owner of the company and a family friend, brought me on board in 2021. This was something totally new to me and Blake reaching out specifically to me meant a lot. **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** In 2023 I was tasked with starting the Hydrovac Division. I took the opportunity with great pride and personally worked in the field with my crew for a year. We started with one vac truck and by year's end, we grew to eight vac trucks, and are currently continuing to grow. It was a great accomplishment for the company and was a great test to see my full potential. **When I'm not working:** You'll either find me on a golf course or soaring through the skies in an airplane. I have a huge passion for aviation, which led to me obtaining my pilot's license. **My local mentor:** I met Sammie Smith in high school. I loved playing football, and he helped me with speed and agility. His on-field coaching was amazing, but the life lessons I learned from coach Sammie have stuck with me daily and I can't thank him enough for that. **The best advice I ever received:** "Adversity introduces you to yourself," a quote by author Carey D. Lohrenz, the first female F-14 pilot. **Fun fact:** My little brother is an outstanding saxophone player and after going to many of his performances, I found a love for jazz music.



Chandler Holt

OCCUPATION
Owner/General Contractor of Holt House Construction

AGE
30

What I do: I oversee all business financials and day-to-day management of all operations. **How I got my start:** My career started in custom cabinetry and millwork for my father-in-law's family-owned business, Munz Design, in 2017. **I'm passionate about building because:** I thoroughly enjoy working with my hands and seeing a project come from the planning stage to fruition. God has blessed us with this business and has allowed me to provide an honest living for my family through it. It's also allowed my wife, Brianne, and I to work together on something we share a passion for. That's the cherry on top! **My biggest professional accomplishment so far:** Becoming a licensed state contractor and starting my own company. The relationships I've built with my trades is also one of the best parts of my professional career. **When I'm not building houses:** I love to go boating in the local Florida waterways with the family and going deep sea fishing and waterfowl hunting are some of my other favorite things. **My first job:** My first paid job was as a professional cowboy. **My local mentors:** Dean Carter gave me my start in residential construction and Bryan Summers runs multiple successful businesses. Both have supported my growth in this industry in many ways.



Katy Welch Cintron

OCCUPATION
Chief Operations
Officer, Merrill
Insurance, Eustis

AGE
30

What I do: Leading leaders and our entire team, managing systems and processes and all things people, places and things. **How I got started:** Before working in insurance, I spent time in the event sales space, and prior to that worked for the executive office of Governor Rick Scott's Administration while I was living in Tallahassee. Seven years ago, I started on the carrier side in personal claims and found my way to Merrill Insurance through a mentor as a commercial lines account manager. I grew into my current role now as our organization grew. **Outside of the office:** There isn't a ton of spare time with a toddler, a career and sports, but I enjoy traveling with my husband and my son, attending sporting events and coaching volleyball. **My local mentors:** In my local community, I have more mentors than I can count. But just to name a few: Kent Merrill in the insurance space, Jim Hoffman in the coaching sphere and his daughter Alisha Winterdorf, one of my best friends. **The best advice I've received:** The cheesiest advice is what I am still working to get better at every day just like many, many young professionals do. "Don't get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life." **Fun fact:** I'm a coach for American Athletic Clubs, a girl's youth volleyball club in Central Florida.



Noelle Schnacky

OCCUPATION
Student and Founder/
Executive Director of
"Hope for Heart Kids"

AGE
18

What I do: Fundraising, book distribution, advocacy and awareness, leadership and management and community outreach.

How it all began: I started Hope for Heart Kids in honor of my cousin, Tyler Schnacky. He was born with hypoplastic left heart syndrome (HLHS) and fought a brave battle with congenital heart disease (CHD). He sadly passed away at 15, but his journey inspired me to take action and support other children and families facing similar challenges. **I'm passionate about my organization because:**

CHD is the most common birth defect, occurring 60 times more frequently than childhood cancer, but without the same level of awareness. **In my spare time:** I help lead the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), participate in Varsity Cheer at LMHS and in the Youth Group at Lakeside Church (Oakland). I've also been a competitive dancer for 15 years at Shooting Stars School of Performing Arts under Miss Melissa Stokes, I love traveling with my family and wakeboarding on Lake Minnehaha – it's one of my favorite ways to unwind – Lake Life! **My first job:** Miss Winter Park's Teen for the Miss Florida Organization. **Fun fact:** As a senior, I'm currently planning a "Heart of Lake Minneola High" scholarship pageant to crown a Miss and Mr. Lake Minneola High School.



Daniel Warhman

OCCUPATION

Owner of DNA Signs & Graphics

AGE

39

What I do: I oversee daily operations, manage client relations and lead our design and production team. I also work directly with clients as a vehicle wrap consultant, helping them bring their brand visions to life through custom signage and graphics. **How I got started:** I'm from Venezuela and began my career there in 2006 after earning a degree in graphic design.

I'm passionate about signs and graphics because: I love transforming ideas into reality. **My biggest professional accomplishment:** Launching DNA Signs & Graphics with my wife Alejandra and growing it into a trusted name in the signage industry.

When I'm not wrapping cars or designing graphics: I enjoy spending time with family, especially with my wife and three kids, Eduardo, Leyla and Logan. **My local mentor:** Marcos Diaz, the owner of Signs and Vehicle Wraps, where I began my career in 2012. **The best advice I've ever received:** My grandma said: "God is always with you, so be responsible, never give up, and always hustle for what you want." **Fun fact:** I enjoy cooking to recharge, especially for family during the holidays with dishes like "pan de jamón," a Venezuelan specialty that brings a touch of home and tradition to our celebrations. **Life after 40:** Growing DNA Signs & Graphics by expanding our reach and integrating new technologies in signage, large format printing and vehicle wraps. Additionally, I want to mentor the next generation of professionals in these fields, sharing what I've learned to help others succeed.



Kayla Tidwell

OCCUPATION

Executive Director of Healthcare Operations at AdventHealth Waterman, Tavares

AGE

30

What I do: I lead the oversight of several operational departments, including environmental services, lab, food and nutrition, patient transport and AdventHealth's community clinic. **I'm passionate about healthcare because:** To this day, I'm a

frequent fainter when getting my labs drawn, so instead, I'm happy to support those that have clinical strength. Anything that I can do to help make the work of those who care for others easier is something that brings me joy. **When I'm not at the hospital:** I enjoy traveling with my husband, Ryan, listening to audiobooks and playing the violin in the AdventHealth Orchestra, which is made up of AdventHealth employees who play a musical instrument. **My first job:** Toss-up between a nanny and working in the registrar's office at my high school. **Fun facts:** I've climbed the Great Wall of China, I was class president for my senior year in high school and college, I eat popcorn for dinner at least three times a week and I hold two bachelor's degrees. **Life after 40:** I'm not sure where I'll be after 40, but I'm thankful for Christ who will guide me through it.

Langdon Dinsdale

OCCUPATION

Owner, Soma Health & Performance, Clermont; Holistic Physiotherapist/Pain and Rehabilitation Specialist

AGE

35

What I do: I help people overcome chronic pain, injuries and health issues such as autoimmune disorders. **How I got started:** I began in 2008 after graduating from the University of Ottawa Human Kinetics Program. **I'm passionate about holistic pain rehabilitation because:**

I absolutely love helping people. Getting to help clients overcome years of chronic pain or helping people to heal from serious disorders is what gets me out of bed and excited in the morning.

My biggest professional accomplishment: Working with Olympic athletes Kenny Bednarek and Aaron

Brown to overcome injuries and then become Olympic medalists in sprinting events. **My first job:**

Selling athletic footwear at a store called Sport Check in Canada. **When I'm not rehabilitating patients:** I train for Ninja Warrior and compete, and I even made it to the world championships. I also competed on the last two seasons of the TV show American Ninja Warrior.

My local mentor: Kay Simpson, who is always helping the community in her spare time and working with cancer patients. **The best advice I've received:** "If you can't explain something to a 12-year-old, you don't know what you

are talking about." **Fun fact:** I live my life barefoot, and I haven't worn shoes in nine years. I travel barefoot, work barefoot, run and do triathlons barefoot, go to stores barefoot and I competed on American Ninja Warrior as the "Barefoot Ninja."



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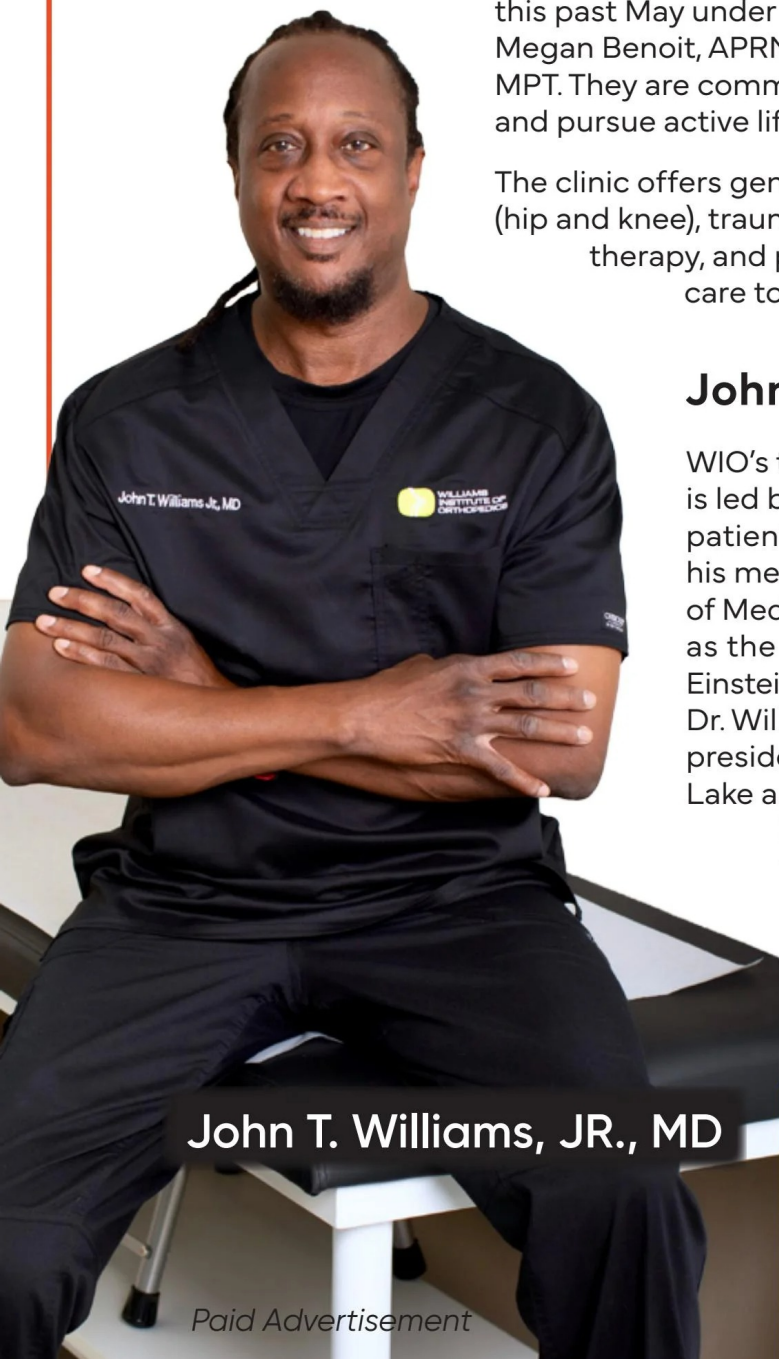
Williams Institute of Orthopedics offers New Lease on Joint Life

Dr. John T. Williams Jr. has opened a new orthopedic practice in Lady Lake. The Williams Institute of Orthopedics (WIO) opened its doors this past May under the leadership of Dr. Williams, nurse practitioner Megan Benoit, APRN, and physical therapist Nicole Zebrowski, MTC-MPT. They are committed to helping patients optimize joint health and pursue active lifestyles through their ethos "Healing in Motion."

The clinic offers general orthopedic services, total joint replacements (hip and knee), trauma and fracture management, regenerative therapy, and physical therapy, providing excellent orthopedic care to residents of the tri-county area.

John T. Williams, JR., MD >>>

WIO's talented team of orthopedic health professionals is led by John T. Williams Jr., MD. Prior to building his patient base in Central Florida, Dr. Williams earned his medical degree from Howard University College of Medicine in 1994, eventually serving eleven years as the director of the total joint program at Albert Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia. Most recently, Dr. Williams served for the past seven years as president of Advanced Orthopedics Institute in Lady Lake and is currently the Chairman of Surgery at UF Health Spanish Plaines Hospital. He is a total joint replacement surgeon specializing in hip and knee replacements and revisions. His goal is to help his patients get back to their preferred lifestyles and activities. Call today to schedule an appointment.



John T. Williams, JR., MD

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WILLIAMS INSTITUTE OF ORTHOPEDICS

THE WIO TEAM

The Williams Institute of Orthopedics team brings years of specialized expertise and a shared commitment to healing to every patient. Our surgeon, providers, and staff are dedicated to helping patients regain strength and mobility through advanced orthopedic care and personalized recovery plans.

Megan Benoit, APRN >>>>

Megan Benoit joins WIO as a nurse practitioner. Mrs. Benoit earned her Master of Science in Nursing degree from the University of South Alabama in 2017. She has worked alongside Dr. Williams as a certified nurse practitioner for the past seven years, seeing patients, assisting in surgery, and providing pre- and post-op education and care. She uses a holistic approach to patient care and believes listening to patients' needs and concerns provides the best outcomes.



Nicole Zebrowski, MPT, MTC >>>>

Nicole Zebrowski is the Director of Physical Therapy at WIO. A graduate of Florida State University, Mrs. Zebrowski earned her master's degree in physical therapy and Manual Therapy Certification from the University of St. Augustine. She has been a practicing physical therapist for 27 years. She shares Dr. William's and Nurse Practitioner Benoit's holistic patient care approach. She enjoys educating patients and helping them resume life and recreational activities post-injury or surgery.



WILLIAMSORTHOPEDECS.COM

| (352) 775-1221

SERVICES & EXPERTISE

Williams Institute of Orthopedics is proud to offer a high level of expertise in general orthopedics, with a focus on knee and hip joints. Our practice offers state-of-the-art procedures and technologies to help heal and get back to your daily activities. We are trained in a wide variety of surgical and non-surgical treatment options that are tailored to you and your unique needs. Our onsite physical therapy clinic is also a convenient way to get back to living after an injury or procedure.

Contact us to schedule an appointment!



Robotic Surgical Assistant "ROSA"

Robotic assisted knee surgery facilitates the surgeon's ability to utilize soft tissue feedback and accurate bone resections with the aim of restoring a patient's natural knee alignment and balancing. ROSA collects metrics during the surgery to aid in decision making and data driven insights with the objective of achieving an optimal outcome for each patient. This can also lead to less postoperative pain, a shorter recovery period and improved range of motion.

Physical Therapy (PT)

WIO features onsite Physical Therapy at our clinic. Our coordinated approach to surgery and rehabilitation helps minimize pain while improving balance, functional strength and mobility to resume your recreational sports and daily activities. Our team provides customized home exercise plans and wellness care with an emphasis on manual PT, balance and strengthening.

MyMobility App

Using an innovative approach to pre- and postoperative care, MyMobility mobile app provides education regarding your condition and surgery. It provides exercises prior to surgery to promote strengthening in preparation for postoperative exercises and can be used to send messages directly to your care team. With reminders to complete tasks and continual encouragement throughout the process, your pre- and postoperative course is greatly improved.

CBD Products

WIO features our own line of CBD products. We offer a CBD-infused topical salve and CBD topical massage oil. CBD is known for its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. It helps regulate homeostasis, which is the body's natural tendency to maintain a healthy balance. It is used for chronic pain to reduce opioid use. It can also be used for migraines, fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, tendonitis, pain, inflammation, and more.

Platlet Rich Plasma (PRP)

Platlet Rich Plasma (PRP) is a natural treatment to repair injured tissues. Concentrated platelets obtained from a patient's own blood contain growth factors that stimulate the body's natural healing properties. WIO offers PRP injections to treat pain from arthritis, bursitis, tendonitis, fractures, sprains and more.

ClarixFlo Treatment

ClarixFlo is a non-surgical option used to treat osteoarthritis. It is a sterile powder derived from donated human placental tissue containing growth factors and anti-inflammatory agents that helps repair cells and regenerate damaged tissues. It can also be used to treat fractures, inflammation, bursitis, sprains, and more.

Hyaluronic Acid Injections

Hyaluronic acid (HA) injections are an approved treatment for osteoarthritis of the knee. This is an alternative treatment for steroid injections. HA naturally occurs in the fluid of the knee joint, providing lubrication. These injections increase the amount of HA in the joint to reduce pain and increase range of motion.

STRONGER KNEES, HEALTHIER HIPS

We don't just treat injuries, we help patients regain motion, strength, & confidence for a life in motion.

- General Orthopedics
- Total Knee Replacements
- Total Hip Replacements
- Trauma & Fracture Management
- Regenerative Therapy
- Physical Therapy

GET IN TOUCH TO SCHEDULE YOUR APPOINTMENT!

VISIT WIO >>>

**13696 N US Hwy 441
Lady Lake, FL 32159**

(352) 775-1221

WILLIAMSORTHOPEDICS.COM

*Our office is conveniently located
on Hwy 441 just north of UF Health
Spanish Plains Hospital, next door
to Billy's Cafe.*



35
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HEALTH PROS

PRACTICE. PROFILE. PROCEDURE.



In today's health-conscious world, taking charge of your wellbeing starts with finding trustworthy medical professionals. Whether you're seeking a routine checkup or specialized care, healthcare providers play a vital role in maintaining your health. The great news is that expert care is closer than you think—your local community is home to a wide range of skilled healthcare providers for both adults and children. From dentists and OB/GYNs to optometrists and cardiologists, discover the top healthcare professionals in your area today!

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

Citrus Hearing Clinic

Balanced approach to hearing health.



Hearing loss impacts over 60 million Americans aged 12 and older. As we age, it becomes more common, nearly a third of people 65 and older deal with hearing loss.

These aren't just statistics for the experts at Citrus Hearing Clinic in Clermont. Most of the staff are personally familiar with hearing challenges, which makes them uniquely positioned to help patients of all ages.

A bilateral hearing aid user herself, owner Dr. Laura Pratesi, Au.D., founded the full-service audiology practice in 2018.

Born with progressive hearing loss, she was originally a musical theater and opera major in college, but switched to audiology to help others avoid the struggles she battled. She became the youngest person to complete Auburn's Doctor of Audiology program, graduating in 2012.

"Five of our staff wear hearing aids for different reasons," says Dr. Pratesi. "You don't have to have hearing loss to be a good audiologist, but it's personal for us because we live with this every day."

Specializing in aural rehabilitation, balance therapy, pediatric testing, and patient education, Citrus Hearing Clinic offers:

- **Diagnostic Audiologic Evaluation**
- **Hearing Aid Evaluation, Dispensing and Fitting**
- **Tinnitus Treatment Options**
- **Lenire® Device**
- **Earwax Removal**
- **Pediatric Hearing Care**
- **Vertigo and Balance Assessment**
- **Auditory Processing Assessment**

"Patient-centered care that follows best practices is our top priority," says Dr. Pratesi.

Many patients come to the clinic in need of hearing aids.

"Our job isn't to sell a product; it's to educate patients and help them make well-informed decisions so they know the best device for their type of hearing loss," notes Dr. Pratesi. "The most important part of any hearing aid is how it's programmed. It doesn't matter to us if someone hasn't sourced their hearing aid from us. We're here to help patients at every stage of their journey."

The clinic works with new devices, such as the Apple hearing aids, and the Lenire® device, which has been very successful in treating tinnitus.

Citrus Hearing Clinic works with Phonak, Widex, Oticon, Starkey, Signa, ReSound, Unitron, as well as Advanced Bionics, Cochlear America, and MED EL.

"We're like physical therapists of the ear. We want to be a Mayo Clinic-type office for audiology here in Lake County. Our goal is to help our community have affordable, easily accessible audiology services," says Dr. Pratesi. "If it's ear and hearing related, we can help."

"PATIENT-CENTERED CARE THAT FOLLOWS BEST PRACTICES IS OUR TOP PRIORITY."

DR. LAURA PRATESI, AU.D.



Contact info ➔ 352.989.5123 / 835 7th Street, Ste. 2, Clermont / citrushearing.com



Advancing Care, Preserving Vision

Dr. Joshi's commitment and expertise in macular degeneration management helps patients see a brighter future.

Renowned as one of Florida Retina Institute's vitreo-retinal specialists, Nisarg P. Joshi, M.D. is highly skilled in diagnosing and managing vitreo-retinal diseases, including macular degeneration.

Macular degeneration damages the center of the retina, leading to central vision problems, such as blurriness or difficulty focusing. Both eyes are often impacted, with severity varying greatly. Some individuals notice very little impact, while others may experience more significant changes in shorter periods.

"We all experience wear-and-tear changes to the retina over time. When it's more than expected, we call that age-related macular degeneration," Dr. Joshi explains. "At first, patients may not notice any vision changes. As it progresses, patients may develop subtle blurriness or distortion of their vision."

While macular degeneration most often affects those over the age of 60 and Caucasian individuals, it is also seen in other ethnicities and racial backgrounds.

"There is a hereditary aspect to this condition, where individuals are predisposed because of their genetic makeup," Dr. Joshi notes.

There are two types of macular degeneration—dry and wet—which determine the severity and speed of vision loss. Most patients present with dry macular degeneration, where age-related yellow deposits (drusen) form under the retina, progressing over five, 10, or even 20 years. Wet macular degeneration, characterized by abnormal blood vessels growing under the retina, causing bleeding, fluid leakage, and scar tissue, can cause vision problems in just a few weeks.

Although there is no cure for macular degeneration, Dr. Joshi and the Florida Retina Institute team of doctors are committed to helping patients delay the progression of the disease. "There are lifestyle modifications and things you can do that help macular degeneration and slow down its progression," he says.

Smoking is a significant risk factor, so quitting or avoiding it can be very helpful. Additionally, eating green, leafy vegetables and controlling diabetes, blood pressure, and cholesterol can positively impact disease progression.

"A healthy overall diet is helpful. Taking care of your body is going to help your eyes also," Dr. Joshi advises.

Different treatments are available depending on the type of macular degeneration. For dry macular degeneration, patients can take specially

designed vitamins to slow disease progression. "There's a specific formulation of multivitamin that has been shown to benefit patients with a certain level of macular degeneration—the AREDS II formula," Dr. Joshi says.

Patients are also encouraged to monitor their vision twice a week. This can be as simple as looking at graph paper one eye at a time to notice significant vision changes, indicating that dry macular degeneration is developing into wet macular degeneration.

"Even though there is no cure, early diagnosis helps us better manage the disease and mitigate the damage," Dr. Joshi explains.

For wet macular degeneration, patients can undergo anterior injections into the eye every one to three months to stabilize and slow the disease. These injections, though they may sound intimidating, are designed to be comfortable and generally painless through Florida Retina Institute's process.

"There are two goals with wet macular degeneration: to improve the swelling and bleeding that is already there, and to prevent catastrophic bleeding in the eye," Dr. Joshi says. "That's why it's important for us to work together with our patients to catch wet macular degeneration early. The sooner we catch it, the better we can protect their vision."

Additionally, new medications are available that can slow down advanced dry macular degeneration. While not everyone is a good candidate for these drugs, Dr. Joshi will offer them to patients who could benefit.

"I hope that the newer treatments can last longer so patients do not need to have as many injections. It would be wonderful to find a curative treatment, but in the meantime, we are at our patients' side to protect and preserve vision," Dr. Joshi says.

Florida Retina Institute's multi-ethnic, multilingual team, including Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking doctors and staff, shapes and delivers personalized, world-class care supported by advanced training and expertise. Continuously striving for excellence in vitreo-retinal surgery and treatments, Florida Retina Institute provides exceptional services across its 20 locations in Florida and Georgia.



Nisarg P. Joshi, M.D.

Contact info → 877.357.3846 / 4072 E. SR 44, Wildwood
floridaretinainstitute.com



Robotic-Assisted Surgery at AdventHealth Waterman

Precision robotics offer enhanced patient benefits and set AdventHealth Surgical Program apart.

We live in remarkable times. Medical advancements that once sounded like science fiction have become routine—especially in the operating room.

Robotic-assisted surgery is the latest advancement to upend the status quo and provide patients with an array of benefits over traditional surgery. While patients have come to expect it, not every hospital offers it.

AdventHealth Waterman is one of the few programs in Florida offering advanced robotic technology for specialized procedures like heart surgery and revascularization. Waterman also features

multiple robotic-assisted operating rooms for various surgical procedures.

"We have the most robotic technology in Lake County and are well equipped for all types of surgery where robotics is an option," says Christopher J. Keeler, DO, a board-certified general surgeon with AdventHealth.

"This technology was sorely needed in our market. We launched our robotics program using the da Vinci® Surgical System in August 2022, and within a year had done more than 363 robotic surgeries," says Dr. Keeler.

With two da Vinci® Surgical Systems in use and a third coming in early 2025, there are currently six AdventHealth surgeons using them in Tavares. Robotic-assisted surgery is available for cardiothoracic,

general, gynecological, and urological surgical procedures.

PIONEERING TECHNOLOGY

Most people have heard of laparoscopic surgery, which uses a camera (scope) and requires smaller incisions than traditional surgery. Robotic-assisted surgery adapts this same minimally invasive platform but with even more advantages for both patient and surgeon. The surgeon performs the operation from a bedside console computer station using hand controls to direct the robot's maneuvers within the operating field.

"The robotic optics are 3D and magnified 10 times, which helps us clearly see all the fine qualities and layers of the tissues and structures we're operating on," says

PATIENT BENEFITS

Patients benefit from the precision of robotic-assisted surgery for hysterectomies, gall bladder removal, prostatectomies, tubal ligation, cystectomy, kidney removal and transplants, joint replacements, mitral valve repair and more. When compared with traditional surgery, robotic-assisted surgery offers numerous advantages, including:

- **Smaller incisions**
- **Fewer complications**
- **Less blood loss and fewer transfusions**
- **Less scarring**
- **Lowered risk of infection**
- **Shorter hospital stays**
- **Faster return to everyday routines**
- **Less post-op pain**



Dr. Keeler. "We're still using a camera and making small incisions, but an advantage with robotics is that it minimizes the number of people in the operating room."

Using the Da Vinci's robotic arms and instruments, the surgeon can work from angles and positions that would otherwise be difficult to access. The surgeon controls the robotic arms, which are steadier than human hands.

"The da Vinci has taken what was already established in the surgery world, including laparoscopic camera technology, and made it better," says Dr. Keeler.

GAME CHANGER

Gary Allen, MD, MMM, FACS, has been a cardiothoracic surgeon for 24 years and now performs robotic-assisted heart surgeries at AdventHealth Waterman. These include the usual portfolio of adult cardiac cases, such as bypass, valve repair and replacement, aneurysms, and atrial fibrillation surgery.

"The results have been excellent," says Dr. Allen, noting that only three other programs in the state are using this innovative technology in their cardiac surgery program.

He says the new technology is a game changer.

"This is truly minimally invasive. We've gone from traditional open-heart surgery with a 10-inch incision in the breastbone to two to three small incisions under the left breast," explains Dr. Allen.

"With traditional surgery the patient still has the breathing tube in for a few hours after surgery. With robotics, the breathing tube comes out right at the end of surgery. Typically, patients who have surgery in the morning are walking around in the

afternoon. It's just one more advantage that the patient is breathing on their own and moving earlier," he adds.

Dr. Allen notes that, on average, patients return home two to three days post-surgery, as compared to five to seven days with traditional surgery.

Patients with jobs that are not physically demanding are generally back to work within two weeks. Even people with jobs requiring physical exertion usually return to work sooner than with traditional cardiac surgery. This is true for most robotic-assisted surgeries.

"For the first time in my career, I've had to write letters saying a patient could go back to work earlier than expected," says Dr. Allen.

EXPERT TEAM

"We have a good commitment from AdventHealth to make sure this technology is uniform through all our hospitals. We're committed to our patients and the community to further advance their healthy lifestyles," says Dr. Keeler.

The skilled team of board-certified AdventHealth Medical Group surgeons performing robotic-assisted surgery at Waterman includes:

GENERAL SURGERY



CHRISTOPHER KEELER, DO



JASON SMITH, DO



DAN TRAN, MD

CARDIOTHORACIC SURGERY



GARY ALLEN, MD, MMM, FACS



TERRY OLIVAS, MD

GYNCOLOGIC SURGERY



MAMIE ROGERS, MD

"WE HAVE THE MOST ROBOTIC TECHNOLOGY IN LAKE COUNTY AND ARE WELL EQUIPPED FOR ALL TYPES OF SURGERY."

DR. KEELER

"Contact us to determine if you're a candidate for robotic-assisted surgery," advises Dr. Allen. "Not every patient is a candidate, but a short screening call or office visit can help determine if robotic surgery is best for you. New patients are generally seen within 48 hours."

Contact info → AdventHealth Waterman / 1000 Waterman Way Tavares
352.253.3333 / NorthLakeHealthcareRobotics.com


AdventHealth

Village Heart and Vein Center

Doctor-patient teamwork makes a difference in cardiac care.



When Dr. George Couturier founded Village Heart and Vein Center in 2011, he had a vision of providing cardiac expertise to Central Florida patients. Through dedication, hard work and assembling a team of skilled doctors, that vision became reality.

Village Heart and Vein Center (VHVC) has become a trusted resource for the community. The practice has developed an outstanding reputation for treatment in all areas of cardiology, electrophysiology and vascular disease, as well as preventative care.

In addition to multiple doctors, the team includes nurse practitioners

and physician assistants who work hand-in-hand with the cardiologists to serve their patients.

Advances are ongoing in the world of cardiac care, and the practice consistently works with industry leaders to come up with new processes and procedures.

"The most impactful change in cardiac care over the past two decades is the widespread adoption of Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR), a minimally invasive procedure that allows for the replacement of a narrowed aortic valve without major open-heart surgery," notes Dr. Couturier. "This has been considered a revolutionary advancement in the field of cardiology, opening the door for other transcatheter interventions for structural heart disease."

TAVR significantly improves treatment options for elderly patients with severe aortic stenosis who might not have been able to tolerate traditional surgery.

Dr. Couturier notes that other impactful changes in cardiac care include advanced imaging techniques, improved drug therapies, and cardiac rehabilitation programs.

The team at VHVC believes patient care is about more than innovative treatment and knowledgeable doctors. It's reassuring to work with compassionate doctors who take time to explain procedure details and answer questions.

"At Village Heart and Vein, we believe patient care centers on shared decision-making. The best outcomes happen when we work together as a team, combining our experience as doctors with your personal experiences and concerns," says Dr. Couturier.

Building that rapport between patient and doctor is a process. For this reason, it's important to visit your cardiologist at least once a year. Complete all recommended tests promptly and follow up to review results.

VHVC is one of the few practices that offers same day appointments to established patients.

"We pride ourselves on being able to offer a live person when you call our office during business hours," says Dr. Couturier. "Your care is our highest priority."



"THE BEST OUTCOMES HAPPEN WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER AS A TEAM, COMBINING OUR EXPERIENCE AS DOCTORS WITH YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND CONCERNS."

DR. COUTURIER

Contact info → 352.674.2080 / villageheartandvein.com
LADY LAKE / 8575 NE 138th Ln., Ste. 203, Lady Lake
LEESBURG / 708 Physician Court, Ste. 2, Leesburg

VILLAGE
 **Heart**
& VEIN CENTER

Dr. Garcia

Proactive approach makes health a priority.

Empowering patients to be proactive about their own health is a priority at Village Heart and Vein. This patient-centered approach has attracted a strong team of physicians, including Joel R. Garcia, MS, MD, FACC, FCCP, who joined the practice in September 2023.

A board-certified cardiologist and internist, Dr. Garcia was excited to leave hospital employment and get back into private practice to deliver the type of high quality, compassionate and evidenced-based care found at Village Heart and Vein Center (VHVC).

An expert in most cardiac imaging modalities, Dr. Garcia focuses on general and invasive (non-interventional) cardiology and advanced heart failure.

He explains that cardiac imaging can often diagnose disease before clinical

symptoms are present. Cardiac imaging is also vital for managing disease and providing baseline evaluation of the patient. This provides a good comparison going forward should there be any clinical changes or unexpected cardiac events.

He encourages patients to take steps to reduce their risk of disease and cardiac events.

"Small, consistent lifestyle changes can make a big difference," says Dr. Garcia, who recommends:

- ♥ **A balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats, while limiting processed foods, sugar and salt.**
- ♥ **Regular exercise for at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a week or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise per week.**
- ♥ **Not smoking.**
- ♥ **Limiting alcohol consumption to no more than 2 drinks in 24 hours for males and 1 drink in 24 hours for females.**
- ♥ **Managing stress with stress reduction techniques like mindfulness, meditation, etc.**
- ♥ **Know your numbers: weight, blood pressure, cholesterol.**
- ♥ **Routine visits with your PCP and Cardiologist.**



When patients are educated about heart health, they feel empowered to help themselves. Digital health tools, such as those used at VHVC, help track blood pressure, activity levels, weight, diet and other metrics.

"These tools allow real-time feedback, reminders and tailored recommendations that help patients gain power to motivate themselves to take ownership of their health," says Dr. Garcia, who notes that such technology should be combined with "open and non-judgmental" conversations with the patient's healthcare provider.

His focus is always to educate patients so they understand how daily choices impact the heart and how small, consistent changes can prevent major issues.

"The goal is to shift the mindset from reactive care to proactive prevention," says Dr. Garcia, who sees patients at the Leesburg location and at the UF Health Leesburg Hospital.

"SMALL, CONSISTENT LIFESTYLE CHANGES CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE."

DR. GARCIA



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LEESBURG / 708 Physician Court, Ste. 2, Leesburg

VILLAGE
 **Heart**
& VEIN CENTER

Effective Treatment Puts Hearts Back in Rhythm

Hear rhythm abnormalities, also called arrhythmias, are a common occurrence. An arrhythmia can cause the heart to beat abnormally fast, abnormally slow or beat irregularly. Symptoms can limit activities and negatively affect quality of life.

At Village Heart and Vein Center, Christopher Jones, MD, is well equipped to care for heart rhythm needs. Dr. Jones is a cardiologist who specializes in cardiac electrophysiology, which is the diagnosis and treatment of abnormal heart rhythms.

After completing medical school, Dr. Jones completed residency in internal medicine at East Carolina University. He then completed a fellowship in general cardiology at Marshall University, followed by two years of advanced training in

electrophysiology at the University of Chicago.

As an electrophysiologist, Dr. Jones works with patients to provide a stable heart rhythm. Although he manages and treats all heart rhythm abnormalities, he's especially enthusiastic about atrial fibrillation. Often referred to as AFib, atrial fibrillation is the most commonly diagnosed cardiac arrhythmia. One in 4 adults over 40 years old will be diagnosed with AFib.

SYMPTOMS OF AFIB CAN INCLUDE:

- ♥ Fatigue
- ♥ Shortness of Breath
- ♥ Palpitations
- ♥ Difficulty Exercising
- ♥ Dizziness
- ♥ Weakness
- ♥ Anxiety

Atrial fibrillation occurs when the two upper chambers of the heart, called the atria, beat rapidly and irregularly.

Not all AFib patients experience symptoms. In fact, 15 to 30 percent of

people with AFib don't experience any symptoms. Whether symptoms are present or not, a diagnosis of AFib is associated with a 5 times higher risk of stroke.

Due to the progressive nature of AFib, effective management becomes more difficult as the condition worsens.

While many patients with AFib and other arrhythmias are managed with medicines, approximately 50 percent of arrhythmia patients can't tolerate needed medications. Certain patients are best served with a specialized procedure called cardiac ablation.

"My training allows me to provide this minimally invasive procedure to locate and stop the cause of problematic arrhythmias with the goal of eliminating the need for daily medications to maintain a normal heart rhythm," explains Dr. Jones.

"Heart health is a passion of mine. I strive to provide optimal heart rhythm management to allow my patients the confidence to engage in their favorite activities."

"I STRIVE TO PROVIDE OPTIMAL HEART RHYTHM MANAGEMENT TO ALLOW MY PATIENTS THE CONFIDENCE TO ENGAGE IN THEIR FAVORITE ACTIVITIES."

DR. JONES

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LADY LAKE / 8575 NE 138th Ln., Ste. 203, Lady Lake
LEESBURG / 708 Physician Court, Ste. 2, Leesburg

VILLAGE
 **Heart**
& VEIN CENTER

Meet Dr. Alfred J. Cook, Jr.

A leader in his field, Dr. Cook's expertise spans sports medicine, shoulder surgery, and cartilage regeneration. He's passionate about helping athletes, active individuals, and older adults recover quickly and return to their routines stronger than before. His commitment to advancing regenerative medicine has made him a crucial contributor to healing methods

that stimulate the body's natural processes.

COMPREHENSIVE ORTHOPEDIC SERVICES

At AOI, the approach is holistic, covering a wide range of care options:

Expert Surgeries:

From shoulder replacements to rotator cuff repairs, each procedure is crafted with precision for swift recoveries.

Joint Health:

Specializing in shoulder rehabilitation and recovery, Dr. Cook, an expert in joint health, focuses on delivering exceptional outcomes for individuals seeking improved mobility and strength.

Specialized Treatments:

Addressing everything from sprains, fractures, and cartilage injuries to tendonitis, the team at AOI prioritizes minimizing pain and maximizing recovery.

At AOI, the team includes highly skilled physical therapy professionals who work closely with Dr. Cook to provide comprehensive care. Their expertise complements his knowledge in orthopedics, ensuring patients receive tailored rehabilitation programs that promote optimal recovery and

long-term mobility. Together, they create a seamless continuum of care for every patient. It isn't just on treatment—it's about creating a plan tailored to every patient's needs, ensuring long-term mobility and well-being.

INNOVATING FOR THE FUTURE

Dr. Cook's pioneering advancements in surgical navigation and his contributions to shoulder replacement procedures underscore AOI's commitment to bringing cutting-edge solutions into everyday healthcare. With these tools, the team operates at the forefront of precision medicine, offering patients innovative solutions with enhanced accuracy and results.

YOUR PARTNER IN PAIN-FREE LIVING

AOI doesn't just treat injuries—it partners with patients on a journey toward a healthier, more active lifestyle. Whether it's relieving chronic joint pain or performing complex surgical interventions, AOI's supportive care helps you get back to living your best life.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT AOI AND SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT HERE:

advancedorthopedicsinstitute.com

Or call us at **352.751.2862**. At AOI, your path to pain-free living is just a step away.



Contact info → 352.751.2862 / Sharon L. Morse Medical Center
1400 US Hwy. 441, #552, The Villages / AdvancedOrthopedicsInstitute.com



ADVANCED
ORTHOPEDICS
INSTITUTE

Florida Cancer Specialists & Research Institute

Experienced doctors you can trust to treat your unique cancer.

PROVIDING THE MOST ADVANCED TREATMENTS, CLOSE TO HOME

Cancer treatment can be complex and span months and years. That's why it's so important for patients to have convenient access to the comprehensive care they need and an experienced team of cancer experts they can trust, close to home.

From genetic screening to immunotherapies and access to the latest clinical trials, the top-ranked cancer experts at Florida Cancer Specialists & Research Institute (FCS) provide the most advanced treatments at eight locations in Lake and Sumter counties.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR PATIENTS IS AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING WE DO

At FCS, every interaction is expertly and precisely focused on each patient's experience and well-being to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Our skilled and compassionate physicians, clinicians and support staff are driven by a shared purpose – to provide exceptional cancer care, the best available treatment options and compassionate support every step of the way. Our modern office locations are comfortable and welcoming and provide a wide range of treatment services, reducing the need for additional travel and minimizing disruption to daily life.

EMBRACING INNOVATION TO DELIVER PERSONALIZED, PRECISION MEDICINE.

FCS physicians and patients are part of leading-edge cancer innovations and

discoveries through participation in clinical trials. In fact, the majority of new cancer drugs approved for use in the U.S. in recent years were studied in clinical trials with FCS participation prior to approval. No other community-based oncology practice in Florida matches the clinical trial opportunities we make available to patients close to home.

Our cutting-edge next-generation genomic testing rapidly detects mutations in hundreds of different genes simultaneously. This allows physicians to personalize treatments based on each patient's unique genetic makeup and provide the best matches for clinical trial opportunities.

Through continuous strategic investments in the highest-quality and most advanced technologies, FCS is able to deliver truly personalized medicine, increasing cure rates and extending lives.

SERVICES OFFERED

-  Behavioral health therapy
-  Care coordination
-  Clinical trials
-  DigniCap®
-  Genetic counseling
-  Hematology
-  Laboratory
-  Medical oncology
-  Nutritional counseling
-  PET/CT scan
-  Oral oncolytic pharmacy/Rx To Go
-  Radiation oncology



MEET TWO OF OUR LEADING CANCER EXPERTS:



ADEWALE FAWOLE, MD

“MY FOCUS IS ON PROVIDING PATIENTS WITH PERSONALIZED TREATMENT PLANS THAT FIT THEIR CANCER WITHOUT NEGLECTING THE QUALITY OF THEIR LIVES OR THE LIVES OF THEIR LOVED ONES.”

Dr. Fawole, board-certified medical oncologist and hematologist, has broad experience in the treatment of cancers of the breasts, lung, prostate, GI system, head and neck, and central nervous system. He also treats patients with lymphomas, multiple myeloma, anemia and other blood disorders.



IBRAHIM SADEK, MD

“I ALWAYS TELL MY PATIENTS TO NEVER GIVE UP; THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING WE CAN DO FOR CANCER. WE HAVE ACCESS TO THE NEWEST AND MOST ADVANCED MODALITIES, AND WE ARE HERE TO GO THROUGH EVERY STEP OF THE JOURNEY WITH YOU.”

Dr. Sadek is a board-certified medical oncologist who provides care for all forms of cancer and blood disorders. He has a special interest in cancer immunology.

Locations → Lake County

CLERMONT SOUTH / 352.394.1150 / 1340 N. Hancock Road, Clermont
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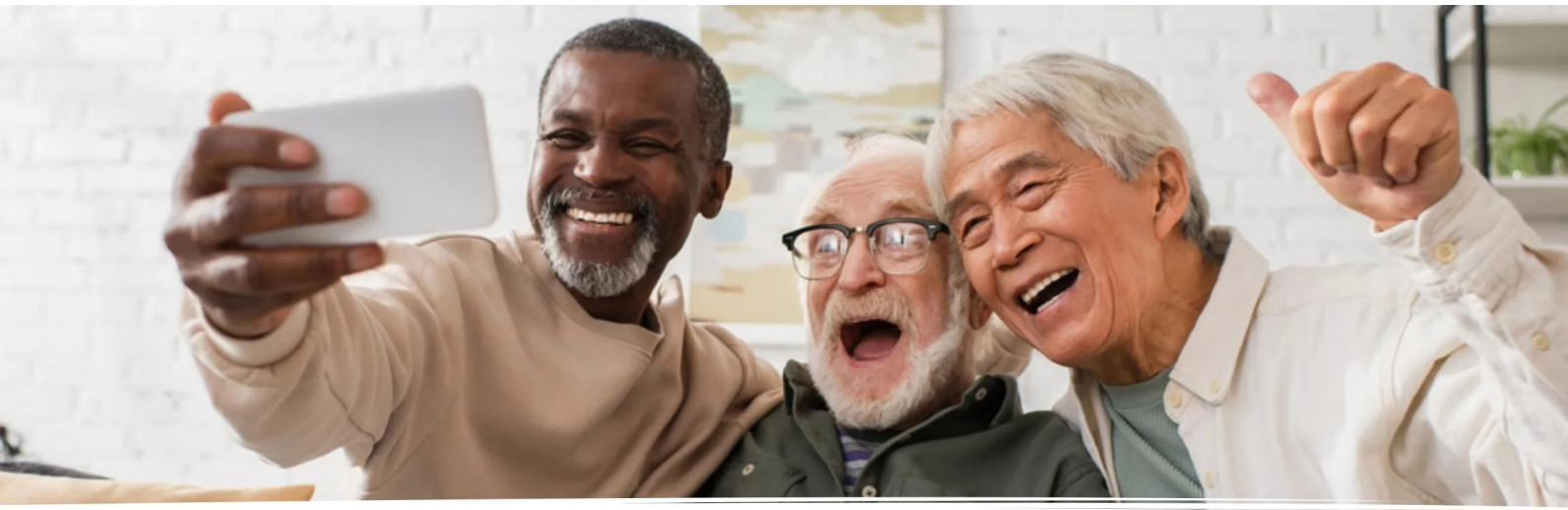
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PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

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Board certified in both general and vascular surgery, Dr. Nordin attended medical school in Montreal. After her residency and fellowship, she worked in private practice in Portland, Oregon, for 12 years.

A fellowship-trained vascular surgeon, Dr. Nordin specializes in:

- carotid artery disease
- abdominal aortic aneurysm
- lower extremity arterial disease
- dialysis access
- lower extremity venous insufficiency and in-office treatment

Born and raised in Malaysia, she knew early in life that she wanted to be a physician.

"My father had a heart attack when I was in my early teens. Seeing the amazing things that doctors and nurses do to help sick patients was eye opening for me. That made

me decide to pursue medicine," says Dr. Nordin.

"While doing my medical school rotations, I fell in love with cardiac surgery and vascular surgery because of the delicate surgical skills and precision that's necessary for those fields," she adds. "Ultimately, I chose vascular surgery because of the wider scope of diagnoses it encompasses."

The experience with her father's heart attack was powerful motivation for Dr. Nordin's eventual career. It also gave her profound empathy for her patients and helps her to relate to them and their families.

Dr. Nordin lives in Lady Lake, conveniently located between the hospitals in Leesburg and The Villages, and the OHMG FHV Health clinics in both locations.

She and her husband have a 12-year-old son. The family enjoys going to the beach, boating, and exploring their new surroundings, including theme parks.

Since moving to Florida in 2023 to join the practice, Dr. Nordin has been impressed with the active outdoor lifestyle.

"Work is busy with The Villages right around the corner. I evaluate and treat a bigger number of much older patients here than I'm used to, and I believe that is due to the

active lifestyle that is common in the Sunshine State," she says.

When patients ask what they can do to stay healthy as they age, Dr. Nordin's advice is, "Keep moving!"



NINA NORDIN, MD
VASCULAR SURGEON

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AGENDA

EVENTS
TRAVEL
PEOPLE

LOCAL TALENT

From karaoke nights to symphony stages, Mark Raisch proves it's never too late to chase dreams.

PG

75





THE TO-DO LIST

2025

Jan.

JAN
25

EVENT

Trucking Tasty

Enjoy Clermont's most popular food trucks as they battle for 'best of' in three categories. Winners will receive a cash prize, trophy and bragging rights for the year. Live music, vendors, face painting and fun for all ages.

→ Clermont / 4-9pm



JAN
3

EVENT

FRIDAY FUN

End the week with family-friendly fun at First Friday in beautiful historic Eustis! This lively street party has food, vendors and live music for everyone.

→ [Eustis](#) / 352.483.5491 / [events@eustis.org](#)

EVENT

Running of the squares

Lace up your sneakers for a run around Lake Sumter Landing at The Running of the Squares, a 5K race series held in The Villages squares. Avid runners, joggers and speed walkers of all ages are welcome to participate solo or with a team. Race starts at 8am. Register online.

→ 1000 Lake Sumter Landing / 352.753.2270 / [thevillages.com](#)

JAN
11



jan. ON STAGE

Enjoy quality entertainment on the many stages of Lake and Sumter counties.

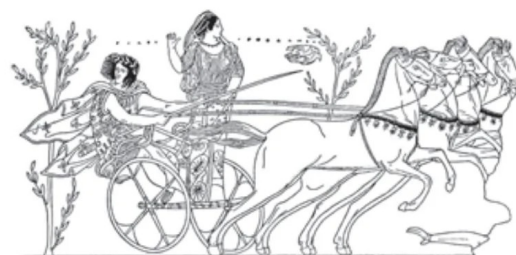
ANCIENT QUEST WITH A MODERN TWIST

1/21-3/1

Pippin is a dark comedy that tells the story of King Charlemagne's son as he embarks on a quest to find his true identity and purpose. Follow him on his enthralling odyssey as he explores the realms of good and evil, reality and fantasy. Adult themes.

The Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol

806 San Marino Dr., The Villages / 352.753.3229
[thesharon.com](#) / 1pm & 7pm (show times vary)



A CHARIOT AWAITS

1/24-2/9

Told by just four actors, Ben Hur follows an amateur theatre troupe producing the massive tale of the fictional Jewish prince and merchant Judah Ben-Hur. Throughout the play, the actors struggle as rivalries form and offstage romances interfere. Complete with chariot race, sea battle and stage combat.

Melon Patch Players / 352.787.3013

[melonpatchplayers.org](#)

ONGOING EVENTS Events are subject to change and cancellation.

EVERY SUN	EVERY SUN	EVERY MON	EVERY TUE	EVERY FRI	1ST SAT	1ST FRI
Clermont Farmers Market 9am-2pm Downtown Clermont	Downtown Mount Dora Village Market 9am-2pm Mount Dora	Sumter County Farmers Market 6am-2pm 524 N. Market Blvd., Webster	Lady Lake Farmers Market 9am-2pm 250 Rolling Acres Rd., Lady Lake	Groveland Farmers Market 9am-1pm Lake David Park, Groveland	Brown's Junk in the Trunk 7:30am-1pm 13940 US 301, Oxford	Eustis First Friday 6-9pm Downtown Eustis



JAN
11-12

EVENT

Active shooter skills

Join the two-day performance carbine/pistol training course at Ares Training Facility in Leesburg. Range orientation, firearms safety, warm-up drills, close quarters engagements and more. @

→ 35615 N. Treasure Island Ave., Leesburg / 352.321.8102
www.arestainingfacility.com / Saturday 9am-5pm
Sunday 9:30am-4pm

Let us help you get the word out!

→ To have an event considered for the calendar, send a short text description along with a color photo (if available) 45 days in advance of event to: calendar@akersmediagroup.com or Lake & Sumter Style Calendar, P.O. Box 490088, Leesburg, FL 34749



jan. JAMS

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1/4 @ 7pm

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STARRING PETER NOONE
The Savannah Center, The Villages

1/5 @ 2:30pm & 7pm

THE SWEET CAROLINE
TRIBUTE STARRING
JAY WHITE
Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

1/5 @ 7pm

A FLOCK OF SEAGULLS
The Sharon, The Villages

1/6 @ 4 & 7pm

A MUSICAL TRIBUTE TO
ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER
The Savannah Center, The Villages

1/8 @ 7pm

ONE NIGHT IN MEMPHIS
The Savannah Center, The Villages

1/9 @ 7pm

THE TEXAS TENORS
The Sharon, The Villages

1/10 @ 7pm

TWITTY & LYNN
The Savannah Center, The Villages

1/10 @ 7pm

LOS LOBOS
The Tracy, Middleton/Sumterville

1/10 @ 7pm

SOUL SACRIFICE
SANTANA TRIBUTE
Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

1/11 @ 3 & 7pm

LA BOHÈME
The Sharon, The Villages

1/11 @ 7pm

THE GATLIN BROTHERS
Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

1/14 @ 4pm

THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL
The Savannah Center, The Villages

1/17 @ 7pm

JASON D. WILLIAMS
Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

1/18-19 @ 2:30pm

CRYSTAL GAYLE
Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

1/18-19 @ 7pm

FORTE
The Tracy, Middleton/Sumterville

1/24 @ 7pm

CELEBRATING MEATLOAF
The Sharon, The Villages

1/24 @ 7pm

LOUIS PRIMA, JR.
Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

1/25 @ 7pm

CREEDENCE REVIVED
The Savannah Center, The Villages

1/26 @ 7pm

HMS PINAFORE
The Sharon, The Villages

1/26 @ 7pm

THE BELLAMY BROTHERS
Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

1/29 @ 7pm

BLUES TRAVELER
The Tracy, Middleton/Sumterville

2/1 @ 7pm

HOT AUGUST NIGHTS
The Savannah Center, The Villages

ONGOING EVENTS Events are subject to change and cancellation.

EVERY THU

Lake County Farmers & Flea Market
8am-noon
2101 N. CR 452,
Eustis

1ST FRI

Clermont First Friday Food Trucks
5:30-9pm
685 W. Montrose St.,
Clermont

2ND FRI

Second Friday Farmers Market
5-9pm
Lake David Park,
Groveland

2ND SAT

Plaid in the Park
5-9pm
230 W. 4th Ave.,
Mount Dora

2ND SAT

Main Street Classic Car Show
5-9pm
510 W. Main St.,
Leesburg

4TH SAT

Eustis Classic Car Cruise-In
4-8pm
Downtown
Eustis



PEOPLE

Mark Raisch

Passion for classic music
and entertaining audiences.

STORY: CINDY PETERSON × PHOTO: MATTHEW GAULIN

Mark Raisch has captivated audiences with his voice and timeless music selections as a full-time singer and entertainer for the past 11 years.

That may come as a surprise to the elementary school teacher he failed to impress when he auditioned for chorus.

"Like lots of kids, I liked to sing, but it wasn't my dream," Mark recalls.

"She actually said, 'I'll call you if we have any openings.'"

Even as a fourth grader, I knew I'd gotten the brush-off."

It wasn't until he watched Fred Astaire in classic Hollywood musicals that he truly felt inspired by the world of entertainment. As Mark's love for Big Band music grew, he was drawn to the sounds of Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey and singers like Ella Fitzgerald and young Frank Sinatra.

Mark's public singing debut came at 21 during a karaoke night on a cruise.

"People loved my singing, and with that affirmation, I decided to pursue music," he says.

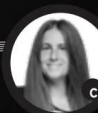
In 2013, Mark and his family moved to Florida, where he took a leap and made music his full-time career. He regularly performs at country clubs, restaurants and other popular venues, in addition to performing with The Villages Symphony Orchestra.

When he's not on stage, Mark enjoys staying active in his community, giving back whenever he can. He often participates in local charity events and projects.

Mark has several exciting projects and upcoming shows planned as he continues to expand his repertoire from classic crooners like Sinatra and Michael Bublé to contemporary hits, including country tunes and a bit of Bruno Mars.

"I think the most important lesson I've learned is to never accept that you can't do something," he reflects. "Life is short. Take that chance, fight for what you love and give all the passion you can. If you're remembered for that, you'll be remembered well." @

Know of a talented person in our community? → Email their story to cindy@akersmediagroup.com.



CINDY PETERSON



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Bob & Claire Heinz



Mark Houghton



Barbara Holleritter, Lisa Carlson
& Jessica Houghton



Travis Johnson, Garry Lenard,
Kathy Lenard & Aliceon Calta



Brady Bass, Conni Berry & Kiana Bean



Ribbon Cutting

LOCO AT THE LAKE

@ EUSTIS × PHOTOS: NICOLE HAMEL

Dozens of boaters and landlubbers celebrated the opening of Coco Locos Tiki Bar at Lake Eustis Waterfront Grille with a ribbon cutting and lakeside party on July 23. Coco Locos hosted friends and family who enjoyed live music by Mark Haughton covering artists like Jimmy Buffet and Toby Keith. Drink specials included Tiki Torch Punch and frozen piña coladas, and signature burgers and peel & eat shrimp were offered to soak up the rum. Giveaways, baby gators and gentle evening breezes off Lake Eustis rounded out the night. @



Shikita Hill, Starr Wingfield, Amanda Brothers,
Marie Albriete & Chuck McMaster

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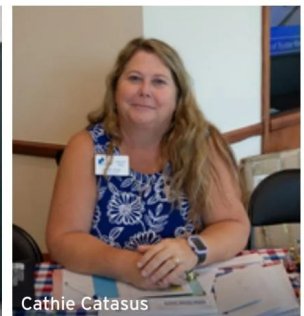
Stephen Teaster, Kathryn Wilgus & Paul Immerdino



John & Jamie Spivey, Laura Corbett & Erin Daly



D'Mani Nettles, Alan Reisman, Allyson Berry,
Tiffany Whitley & Samantha Strasser



Cathie Catusus



Sean Parks, Geoffrey Chernault & Alicia Brown



Ryan Hall & Barbie Harden Hall



Heather & Ken Attermann & Mike Levine



Cheryl Rumbley, Dianne Venetta & June Lang

SHARING IDEAS AND LEADERSHIP

@ LEESBURG × PHOTOS: MATTHEW GAULIN

Politicians, candidates and supporters gathered to exchange ideas and platforms last July 30 at the Lake County Political Hob Nob at Lake-Sumter College in Leesburg. Many aspiring office holders were there to pitch their policies and mingle with local sponsors including USB, Ford Press, **Style Magazine** and Hillcrest Insurance Agency. Oakwood Smokehouse & Grill provided a BBQ feast as each candidate handed out literature, schwag and closing arguments for the August primary. @

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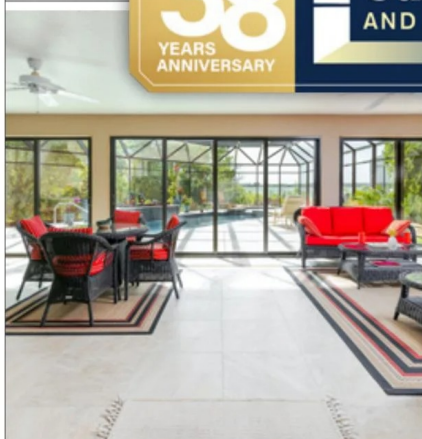


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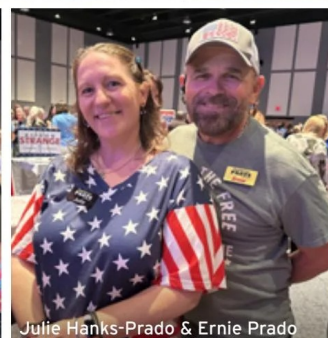
Angel Clark, Otis Taylor, Geneva
Hamilton, David Colby & Nate Edmund



Colleen Wallace, Anthony
Sabatini & Kenny Wallace



Juanita Benedict,
Barbie Hall & Kelli Wallace



Julie Hanks-Prado & Ernie Prado



Terri Kracht & Sheri Olson



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Christy Clark, Susy Gibson, Sean Parks,
Karin Arellano & Theresa Kay



Jeanne Hays, Alan Hays & Mike Trainor



Congressman Daniel Webster,
Pat Caracciolo & Gigi & Rich Capria



Dr. Dot Richardson, Allison
Strange & Laurie Rozier



Congressman Daniel Webster & Team

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SOUTH LAKE LEADERS HAVE VISION

@ CLERMONT × PHOTOS: ROXANNE BROWN

The 2024 Lake County Hob Nob showcase of political candidates took place July 29 at The Clermont Performing Arts Center. Candidates from local, state and federal races mingled with voters, answered questions and put forth their policies to citizens who were then invited to participate in a straw poll organized by the Lake County Supervisor of Elections. This free event was sponsored by Disney, The Clermont Sun and Orlando Health. Food was provided by Lake Catherine Catering and Events. @

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Janet Lewis & Dodi King



Linda & Theo Bob



Stewart Dunaway & Ray Powers

REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

@ TAVARES × PHOTOS: ANTHONY RAO

Museum visitors and history buffs were treated to the little-known story of the “Southern Campaign,” on July 23 at the Lake County Historical Society and Museum in Tavares. Historian Stewart Dunaway presented one aspect of the Revolutionary War that involved The British Southern Campaign. It was implemented, Stewart says, based on the idea that the southern colonists just north of here were very loyal to the Crown. He surmises that the campaign’s failure precipitated the end of the American Revolution. @

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Top Left to Bottom Right:

Luis G. León-Alvarado, MD; S.K. Steven Houston III, MD, FASRS; Thalmon R. Campagnoli, MD;
Thomas A. Barnard, MD; Jaya B. Kumar, MD, FASRS; Nisarg P. Joshi, MD;
Elias C. Mavrofrides, MD; and Matthew A. Cunningham, MD, FASRS.

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From state titles to a
4.2 GPA, Cody Zilcosky
raises the bar in every
area of life.

PG

88





PEOPLE

NATALIE DOAN

Scoring big in basketball and academics.

STORY: KYLE COPPOLA × PHOTO: NICOLE HAMEL

Mount Dora Christian Academy senior basketball star Natalie Doan wasn't always a standout athlete. "I started playing recreation basketball with my brother. I wasn't good at all. I only scored four points the entire first season I played," says Natalie, who was introduced to the sport in 6th grade.

She soon discovered the valuable lesson: Practice makes progress.

"I just kept practicing, and I also like to work out," Natalie says. "The more I work out, the better stamina I have on the court, so that improved too."

Her dedication paid off in her sophomore year, a breakout season that set the stage for her being named team captain as a junior.

Natalie is also a standout student, maintaining an impressive 4.3 weighted GPA, a feat she attributes to strong work ethic instilled by her parents.

"I know the value of hard work. My dad, Son Doan, was born in Vietnam and immigrated to the U.S. when he was 20 years old," she says. "He worked hard, and so did my mother, Denise Dang. They've taught me that if you work hard at something, it pays off."

That dedication paid off in a big way. From scoring only four points in 6th grade, Natalie was named the Class 1A District 6 Player of the Year as a sophomore, and again in her junior year season when she scored an impressive 219 points. Her



transformation into one of the team's key leaders speaks volumes about her determination.

Besides hard work and dedication, Natalie also credits her success to her coach Perry Petrucci.

"He's an amazing coach," she says. "He stays after practice so I can shoot around and he sacrifices a lot of time for us."

Natalie's advice for younger athletes: "Trust in your work. Trust that the hours you put into anything will pay off. I wasn't very good at basketball when I started, but now I'm a team captain. You can do anything you put your mind to."

After graduation, Natalie plans to continue her leadership on a new stage: the United States Merchant Marine Academy.

"I plan on going into Military Marine Transportation," she says. "I've always wanted to explore the world, and what better way than to get paid to travel and serve the country." 🇺🇸



Know a talented student/athlete? Fill us in!

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KYLE COPPOLA

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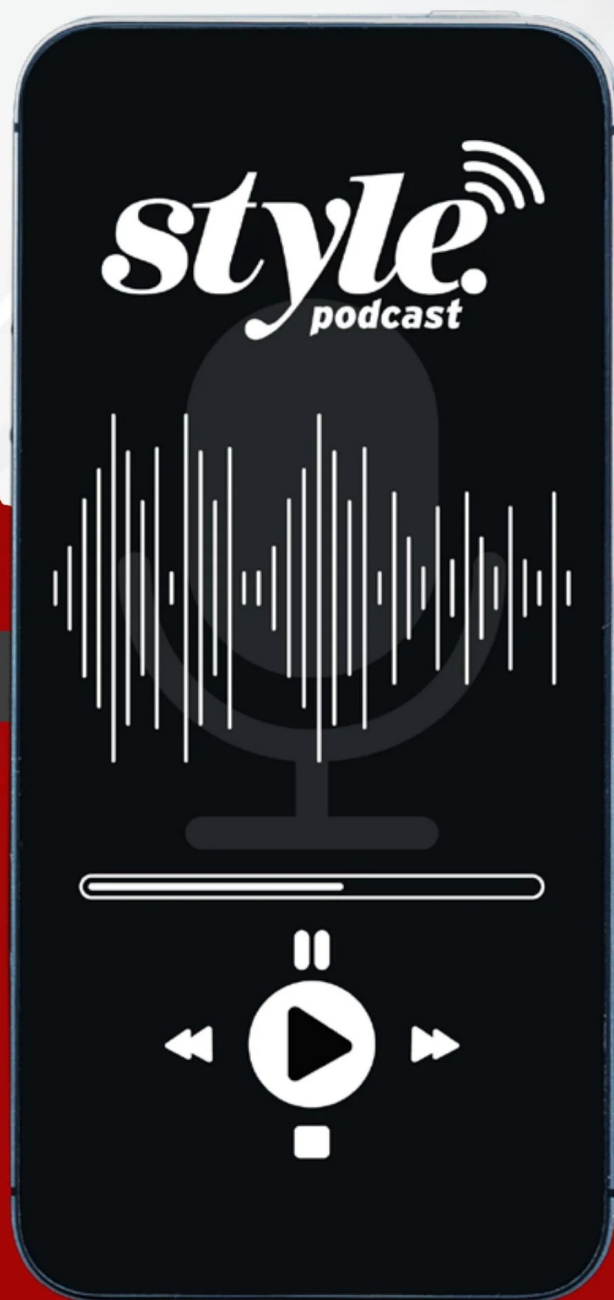
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PEOPLE

CODY ZILCOSKY

Driven to succeed in the weight room and beyond.

STORY: KYLE COPPOLA × PHOTO: NICOLE HAMEL

South Sumter High School senior Cody Zilcosky isn't just a champion in the weight room; he carries a 4.2 GPA and is an achiever in nearly every area of his life.

Last year's Olympic Lifting State Champion (in the 139-lb. Class 1A) has carved a path to success with hard work, dedication and a vision for the future.

Following in the footsteps of his older brother and role model, Chase Zilcosky—a 2022 graduate—Cody first joined South Sumter's weightlifting team as a freshman. He says training with Chase was an invaluable experience.

"Chase really showed me what dedication looked like. And I'm grateful to have had him alongside me in those early days," says Cody, who also finished 3rd in Traditional Weightlifting last season.

His achievements are impressive, but weightlifting success doesn't come easily.

"The hardest part is mind over matter," he explains, especially when you have to make weight. "Sometimes, I'll go up to three days without eating properly to make weight," Cody says.

In addition to school and sports, Cody is dual enrolled at Lake Sumter State College and works part-time at Willie Jewell's Old School Bar-B-Q in The Villages.

"It can be tough managing school, work and sports, but it's worth it," he says.

Under the guidance of Coach Chris Gauntlett, Cody has learned more than just the mechanics of weightlifting.

"Coach Gauntlett is hard on us, but for a good reason," Cody says. "We all appreciate his tough love—it makes us stronger, not only in the weight room but in life."

Cody's advice to younger athletes is simple but powerful: "Find someone older and ask questions. In weightlifting, no one turns you down if you're asking for help. Stick with it, and you'll come out stronger both mentally and physically."

Despite his accomplishments, Cody knows there's always room for growth.

Reflecting on his progress, he recalls his early days, when he struggled to lift just 95 pounds in the snatch. Today, he's lifting over 185 pounds in the snatch and pushed himself close to a 195-pound lift at last year's state championships.

"You can't excel if you don't try," Cody says. "I've learned that perseverance is key. Some days, you won't hit your numbers, but with perseverance, you'll get there."

As he approaches graduation, Cody is preparing to take his drive and discipline beyond the gym. He plans to attend medical school.

For now, though, he remains focused on winning. "I'm competitive, and I love to win," Cody says. "I hope to be state champion in both Olympic and Traditional Weightlifting in 2025."

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STRENGTH UNLEASHED

The rise of Florida's
fittest freshman.

STORY: KYLE COPPOLA × PHOTOS: NICOLE HAMEL

Molly O'Hara is not your typical high school freshman. The 14-year-old East Ridge High School student is making waves in the world of CrossFit, and her story is as inspiring as her impressive achievements.

But Molly isn't about medals or titles; her story is one of legacy, dedication and the joy of competition.

Her passion for CrossFit started early.

"I have formally been training in CrossFit since I was 5 years old, but I've been doing weight training and functional fitness for as long as I can remember," Molly says. "When I was 3, I would lift light weights with my dad."

Molly went on to accomplish feats many athletes only dream of. Her crowning achievement was taking first place in the worldwide CrossFit Open for the State of Florida, which earned her the title of the fittest 14-year-old in Florida and the 32nd fittest competitor in her age division globally.

Looking back, Molly recalls her earliest CrossFit memory—a snapshot of herself doing a bench press under her father's guidance at age 5.

"That was when it really started to feel like part of my life," she reflects.

With nearly a decade of training under her belt, she is now recognized as one of the top youth CrossFit stars in Florida. And her journey has only just begun.

Molly O'Hara



FAMILY LEGACY AND ATHLETIC LINEAGE

Athleticism runs deep in Molly's veins. The O'Hara family has always embraced an active lifestyle. Her mother Kristin, a former collegiate softball player, and her father, Seth, a weightlifter and football player, provided strong athletic influences from a young age. But Molly's greatest source of inspiration may be her grandfather, Coach "Bud" O'Hara, one of the first football coaches at East Ridge High School (which opened in 2002) who is now a member of the school's sports hall of fame.

"Representing East Ridge High School is a blessing for me," Molly says proudly. "Carrying on the O'Hara legacy means a lot. My family has always valued hard work and perseverance, and I want to honor that every time I step into the gym or onto the field."

Molly's dedication to her family goes beyond her achievements; it's about keeping the spirit of discipline and resilience alive through her actions.

ACADEMIC AMBITION

While Molly's athletic resume is striking for a freshman, her commitment to academics is equally impressive. She boasts a 4.5 GPA and has maintained straight A's throughout her academic career.

"Academics are very important to me, and I hope to continue that tradition throughout high school," she says.

Molly's rigorous training schedule for CrossFit never detracts from her studies. She brings the same discipline to her schoolwork as she does to her workouts.

Molly is only halfway through her freshman year, but she's made an impact with the ERHS bowling team (which made the FHSAA State Championships) and is currently lifting for the girls weightlifting team. She also plans to play on the school softball

team. She'll make an impact there too. Molly plays for the WICKED travel team during the off-season.

"Softball is just fun—it's different from CrossFit, and I like being part of a team," she says. "And whether it's weightlifting or bowling, I love that each sport brings something different. It's like a new way to challenge myself."

Her multifaceted approach to sports reflects her versatile nature, and Molly hopes to explore her potential in as many disciplines as possible and have an even more well-rounded athletic base.

THE MINDSET OF A CHAMPION

For Molly, CrossFit is more than a sport; it's a way to test her physical and mental limits.

"I love the adrenaline and determination that comes with competing," she says. "CrossFit is a great way to show your athleticism, and when I'm competing, I feel like I can accomplish anything."

That mindset serves her well as she pursues her goal of competing on an international level and one day standing on the podium alongside her heroes.

One of her most notable role models is the fictional champion Rocky Balboa.

"I really enjoy the Rocky movies," Molly says. "Even though Rocky is a fictional character, his story of being the underdog and becoming a champion through hard work really inspires me."

Her commitment to hard work despite the odds mirrors the resilience Rocky displayed on the big screen. Molly views each day as an opportunity to push herself, even if it means early mornings, tough training and constantly juggling school and sports.

Molly dreams of representing the United States in international competitions like CrossFit legend Tia Toomey does.

"WHEN I WAS 3,
I WOULD LIFT
LIGHT WEIGHTS
WITH MY DAD."



"It's amazing to watch athletes like Tia," Molly says. "Seeing her train and compete shows me what's possible if you really dedicate yourself."

LIFE BEYOND CROSSFIT

CrossFit takes center stage, but Molly makes time for other activities that keep her grounded.

Molly enjoys unwinding with jigsaw puzzles and a good book when she's not training or studying. These quiet moments help her maintain balance in her fast-paced life.

"I'm a pretty competitive person," she admits with a laugh. "But sometimes it's nice to just sit down and relax with a puzzle."

She also spends down time with family, especially when the O'Haras get away.

"I love going on vacation with my family. Camping is one of my favorites, and so are cruises. I'm the middle child, so my sisters and I are pretty close. My parents aren't half bad either!" she adds with a smile.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Now that she's in high school, Molly is balancing academics and athletics while setting new standards for young CrossFit athletes.

"High school feels like a fresh start," she says. "I want to be a strong student and athlete, and I also want to be a positive role model for younger athletes."

Molly's ambitions and accomplishments reflect a maturity

"YOU HAVE TO LOVE WHAT YOU DO AND FIND JOY IN THE HARD WORK."

beyond her years. She aims to excel in competitions, build a legacy and contribute to her community.

Her story is already resonating with younger athletes who look up to her as a source of inspiration. "It's great to see young athletes getting interested in CrossFit," Molly says. "I tell them it's about patience, discipline, and having fun. You have to love what you do and find joy in the hard work."

Molly O'Hara is undoubtedly a name we will be talking about for many years. Her dreams extend beyond medals and titles. Her vision is to lead, inspire and honor a legacy. In the words of her hero, Rocky: "It's not about how hard you can hit, but about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward."

In Molly's case, she's already shown that she can do just that—lifting, learning and leading with a spirit that inspires everyone around her. 

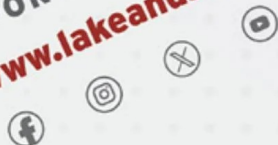


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Marmadukes Lodge dishes up Americana favorites with a twist—think elk bites, specialty burgers, hand-cut fries and more!

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RECIPE

DOMINICAN ROOTS PLANTED IN LEESBURG

Joel Padilla honors his family legacy and teaches cooking skills at The Culinary Lab.

STORY: GINA HORAN × PHOTOS: MATTHEW GAULIN AND NICOLE HAMEL

Chef Joel Padilla seems to cook his Dominican dishes with his mom's voice in his ear and her presence behind his shoulder. And even though Marianela Padilla is happily retired and splits her time between New York City and the Dominican Republic, her spirit is with him for each ingredient, reduction and serving.

"When I was a kid, I could smell my mother's cooking as soon as I reached the third floor after walking home from school," Joel says. "She always had something waiting for me even in the middle of the night, and in our house, everything was made from scratch."

Marianela owned a restaurant in Brooklyn and her son's first job was to help with prep, which involved a certain fruit he has since sworn off.

"It's funny, the plantain is such a staple in Dominican food, but I swear I can barely go near one now after

the thousands I had to peel, slice and mash," Joel says.

His mom's restaurant and home cooking served as his only culinary family legacy until a few years ago when his eldest son did a research paper on their lineage and uncovered a little-known fact.

"I guess our family had a tradition of cooking for royalty," Joel says. "I didn't have any idea about that, but 'Padilla' means saucepan or bread pan in Spanish, so it kind of makes sense."

After moving to Florida in 2007, Joel attended Daytona State College for culinary arts, worked in many high-end kitchens, volunteered for Guy Fieri, was a mentor at the James Beard Foundation and attended Le Cordon Bleu, where he was classically trained.

While his menu tells a story and his ingredients fill the kitchen with smells and sounds of his childhood, he translates that history into innovative and flavorful dishes.

He hopes his style of cooking takes diners on a culinary journey based on his own.

"My recipes are close to my heart as they bring back amazing memories and have my modern stamp on them."

He is now partnering with local farmers Tracy Freeman and Darrell Teddick who own Dirty Dog Organics, a working farm and B&B on Lewis Road in Leesburg. They grow food and raise animals to sustain their own lifestyle, as well as contribute to their eatery. While indoor and outdoor kitchens provide the places to cook, hospitality and forward-thinking help propel the farm-to-table fare to delight foodies and curious diners.

"We started out as real estate investors and mortgage brokers," Tracy says. "Now we have a fully functioning farm and organic restaurant."

Together, they hope to bring quality ingredients to their customers and the community. Chef Joel's cooking school, The Culinary Lab, along with his concept kitchen, Platinum Chefs Empingao, collaborate with Dirty Dog to develop exciting new concepts, such as a

secret or ghost menu designed to draw diners to the farm.

"The Empingao menu only works with a code through Uber Eats/ Grub Hub," Joel says. "It's something that a few big cities have that we are trying here."

In the teaching kitchen, the sweet smell of sweating onions and Dominican oregano pleasantly overwhelms the senses as chef Joel deftly and deliberately spins between the stove and prep area.

"If you walk into a place, you should be able to tell what food is coming from what region of the world," he says. "I guarantee you that this would smell like a Dominican household."

Joel rarely uses measurements, cooking "al gusto" and using his olfactory senses instead of thermometer to know when something is ready. He also creates deep, umami flavors without spending hours over the stove.

"I refuse to spend all day in the kitchen," Joel says. "If you prep your sauces and bases like sofrito, it won't take too long to put your dishes together."

His collaboration with Tracy and Darrell is a work in progress as the cultures and ideas come together. Darrell is very strict about his ingredients being organic and healthy. Joel cooks for flavor and authenticity. And Tracy is there to enjoy it all.

"We go back and forth about the ingredients," Joel says. "They are very particular about what goes into the menu and so we try to accommodate both."

He says that food is a great conversation starter and something we can all bond over no matter what race or culture.

While Joel teaches culinary skills, he believes that humility is the greatest life skill one can have.

"There is no such thing as becoming a master of anything," he says. "I genuinely hope to continue to grow as a chef and explore all the amazing things the culinary world has to offer." 🍷



**SOFRITO
SEASONING BASE**

Sofrito, a staple in every Spanish home, is a base of aromatics and spices that establish the foundation of traditional Dominican cuisine. These ingredients can be found at any Latin market.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 bunches cilantro
- 10 Aji dulce peppers
- 4 heads peeled garlic
- 1 cup of vinegar or white cooking wine
- ½ cup Dominican oregano (*rub it in your hand to activate before placing in blender*)
- salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS:

Put all ingredients in the food processor and process until smooth. If it gets too thick add some water – you want a salad dressing consistency. Store in the fridge in an airtight container. The mixture will hold for a few weeks. Or pour it into ice cube trays and freeze. Once frozen, pop them out, put them in a freezer bag and store in the freezer for up to 6 months.

**DOMINICAN POLLO
GUISADO (STEWED
CHICKEN)****INGREDIENTS:**

- 2 lbs. chicken, cut into small pieces
- 1 lime
- 1 cup vinegar
- 1 Tbsp. Dominican oregano
- 1 red onion diced
- 2 stalks diced celery
- 2 Tbsp. sofrito
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 4 tablespoons Goya olive oil
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 2 cups water
- 1 green bell pepper diced
- 1 red bell pepper diced
- 4 tomatoes (cut into quarters)
- ¼ cup pitted green olives
- 2 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 bunch cilantro
- 1 packet sazón con achiote
- salt & pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS:

Wash chicken in cold water, vinegar and lime and let sit 5-10 minutes, then rinse completely. Combine chicken, sofrito, vegetables, garlic, sazón

con achiote and Dominican oregano (activate oregano by rubbing in your hands) and let sit for at least 2 hours. Heat oil in medium pot over medium-high heat. Add sugar and wait for light amber color. Sear chicken on all sides until caramelized. Add tomato paste, olive, cilantro, remainder of mixture and water. Bring pot to a simmer. Let simmer on low heat for 1 hour or until done. Drizzle with olive oil and serve.

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ARE CLOSE
TO MY
HEART
AS THEY
BRING BACK
AMAZING
MEMORIES
AND HAVE
MY MODERN
STAMP
ON THEM.”**

— JOEL PADILLA



QUIPES DOMINICAN

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup bulgur wheat
- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 green bell pepper
- 1 red pepper
- 1 yellow onion
- 6 cloves garlic
- 1 handful cilantro
- 2 Tbsp. adobo complete
- 2 sazón with achiote packets
- 3 Tbsp. sofrito
- 6 cups low-sodium beef broth
- lard or vegetable oil (for frying)

DIRECTIONS:

In a large bowl, soak bulgur wheat in 6 cups of beef broth overnight, then drain and squeeze using cheesecloth (You want to squeeze as much of the broth out as you can). Finely dice vegetables until they look like confetti. In a large bowl, combine ground beef, vegetable, adobo and sazón. Set aside. Mix the bulgur wheat and beef mixture in a large bowl until fully combined. To assemble quipes, take 3 tablespoons of the bulgur wheat mixture and roll into a football shape. Place on a parchment-lined sheet and refrigerate for 30 minutes or until solid. Heat oil in a pan over medium heat (about 350 degrees). Add enough oil to submerge quipes and fry until browned on all sides, about 8 minutes. Remove quipes from oil and place on a paper towel-lined plate. Serve with white wine escabeche and enjoy!

BLACK BEANS & RICE

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 Tbsp. Goya extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup diced smoked ham
- 1/2 green bell pepper diced
- 1/2 red pepper diced
- 1 yellow onion diced
- 4 cloves garlic
- 1 handful cilantro
- 4 cilantro leaves
- 2 Tbsp. adobo
- 4 sazón with achiote packets
- 2 Tbsp. sofrito
- 2 cups long grain rice
- 1 can Goya black beans
- 4 cups low sodium chicken stock



DIRECTIONS:

Heat oil in medium pot over medium-high heat. Add smoked ham, onions, and peppers; cook about 7 minutes. Add garlic, adobo, sofrito, and aromatics and cook about 3 minutes or until fragrant. Transfer black beans to pot and sauté for about a minute using the juice of the beans to deglaze the pot. Add rice and fold mixture in with rice followed by adding chicken broth. Bring rice mixture to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer covered until rice absorbs water, about 25 minutes. Stir rice and reduce heat to low. Let sit until rice is tender, about 5 minutes more. Grab a fork, fluff the rice and drizzle some olive oil over rice.

BATIDA DE LECHOSA (PAPAYA MILKSHAKE)

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 cups fresh ripe peeled papaya
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 3 cups ice cubes
- 1 qt. evaporated milk
- 1/2 can condensed milk
- 3 Tbsp. cinnamon

DIRECTIONS:

Put all ingredients in the blender and process until smooth. Serve and dust with additional cinnamon.



Chef Joel Padilla

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GINA HORAN

REVIEW

Crafted for the community

Marmadukes Lodge serves local brews, mouthwatering bites and unforgettable vibes.

STORY: ROXANNE BROWN × PHOTOS: MATTHEW GAULIN

Downtown Leesburg has a fresh new hotspot—Marmadukes Lodge Brewery + Eatery—which opened its doors in May 2024 to serve up a creative twist on Americana sports bar favorites.

Owned and managed by James Lent, a seasoned veteran of the craft beer and service industry, Marmadukes aims to make everyone feel at home.

“We’ve got plenty of regulars we’re on a first-name basis with,” James says. “It’s a homey kind of place, like you’re drinking at home, and that’s exactly what we aim for.”

A standout feature of the restaurant is its retractable main wall, which opens to reveal outdoor bar seating that allows guests to enjoy fresh air while dining or sipping drinks. Indoors, Marmadukes offers a spacious setting with bar seating, ample booths and tables for a comfortable experience.

The menu features a large array of appetizers, like cheese curds, fried pickles and green beans, gator and elk bites, loaded fries and more. Main courses include crowd-pleasers like specialty burgers, sandwiches, wraps, wings, chicken tenders and salads, alongside an impressive selection of local craft beers and familiar domestic options.

“We carry the domestics everybody always asks for, but we also have an extensive collection of local craft beers from Florida breweries in a variety of styles and flavors,” James says. “That’s where a lot of my background comes from—the

craft beer industry. I’ve been in it for about 15 years.”

Looking for more? Marmadukes hosts music bingo on Tuesdays from 7 to 9pm, live music on Friday and Saturday nights and a Sunday brunch at 10am featuring a dedicated breakfast menu, bottomless mimosas and Bloody Marys.

Themed nights such as Service Industry Mondays, which honor first responders and military personnel with special deals, keep the fun going.

Tucked in the back beyond Marmadukes’ dining area is Burns Pharmacy, a speakeasy accessible only with a weekly password shared on the restaurant’s Facebook and Instagram pages.

The speakeasy’s name is inspired by the building’s history—it was once a pharmacy. Today, it houses mixologist Katrina Atta, who creates cocktail “art” complete with bitters, sours, tinctures and filled vials





Owner James Lent, Chef Andrea Pewsey & Manager/Chef Matt Koval

displayed on shelves, reminiscent of a vintage apothecary.

“Our mixologist has an incredible amount of knowledge when it comes to creating cocktails; it’s like she’s making art back there,” James says. “We also have a photo on the wall showing when this building used to be Burns Pharmacy.”

Additionally, Marmadukes Lodge leads into Slice, a New York-style pizza shop next door; where guests can grab whole pies or individual slices to enjoy on-site or to-go.

“We have a little something for everyone,” James says.

When I visited Marmadukes recently, I could barely decide what to order! Luckily, fellow **Style** writer Gina Horan and photographers Nicole Hamel and Matthew Gaulin joined me and we sampled a wide variety of dishes.

Our feast included buffalo wings, a thin-crust pepperoni pizza pie, a smash melt double-stack burger with bacon with some of the best fries I’ve had. It’s no wonder, since James says they are hand cut and that there’s one person tasked with cutting potatoes each day.

We also tried a BLT with homemade barbecue chips, a breakfast burrito with beautifully seasoned potato slices, a fresh-baked Bavarian pretzel with warm house beer cheese and fried elk

bites served with ranch dressing and tropical heat sauce.

Gina’s top picks were the breakfast burrito, the elk bites and the pizza.

“The pizza was thin and gooey with parm, butter, and garlic on the crust. The breakfast burrito was very good, and the elk was smashing—very lean,” Gina says.

Call me boring—well, hopefully not—but my favorite dish was the smash burger with fries. Sure, a burger might seem like a safe choice, but this one really stood out. The meat was top-notch, the bun perfectly toasted and the bacon-and-cheese ratio made every bite melt in my mouth. And those fries—crispy, golden and nicely seasoned on the outside yet irresistibly fluffy on the inside—were so good I had to beg someone to get them out of my sight!

Back in the speakeasy, Katrina concocted a Lavender Gin Sour built using a butterfly pea flower infused gin, lavender and a little bit of rose simple syrup, egg whites and fresh lemon juice.

“It’s dry-shaken to aerate and fluff the egg whites, then briefly shaken with a large ice cube to chill, and viola!” Katrina explains, before pouring the drink and topping it with her housemade bitters, featuring nine herbs and spices,

along with little heart designs for a perfect finish.

In the end, our visit was memorable. I will be back. Whether you’re craving a hearty meal, a cold craft beer or a custom cocktail with a side of history, Marmadukes Lodge delivers.

“I love it when customers tell us how much they enjoyed themselves or loved the food,” James says. “That kind of positive feedback makes all the hard work worth it.” 🍷



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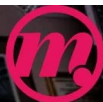
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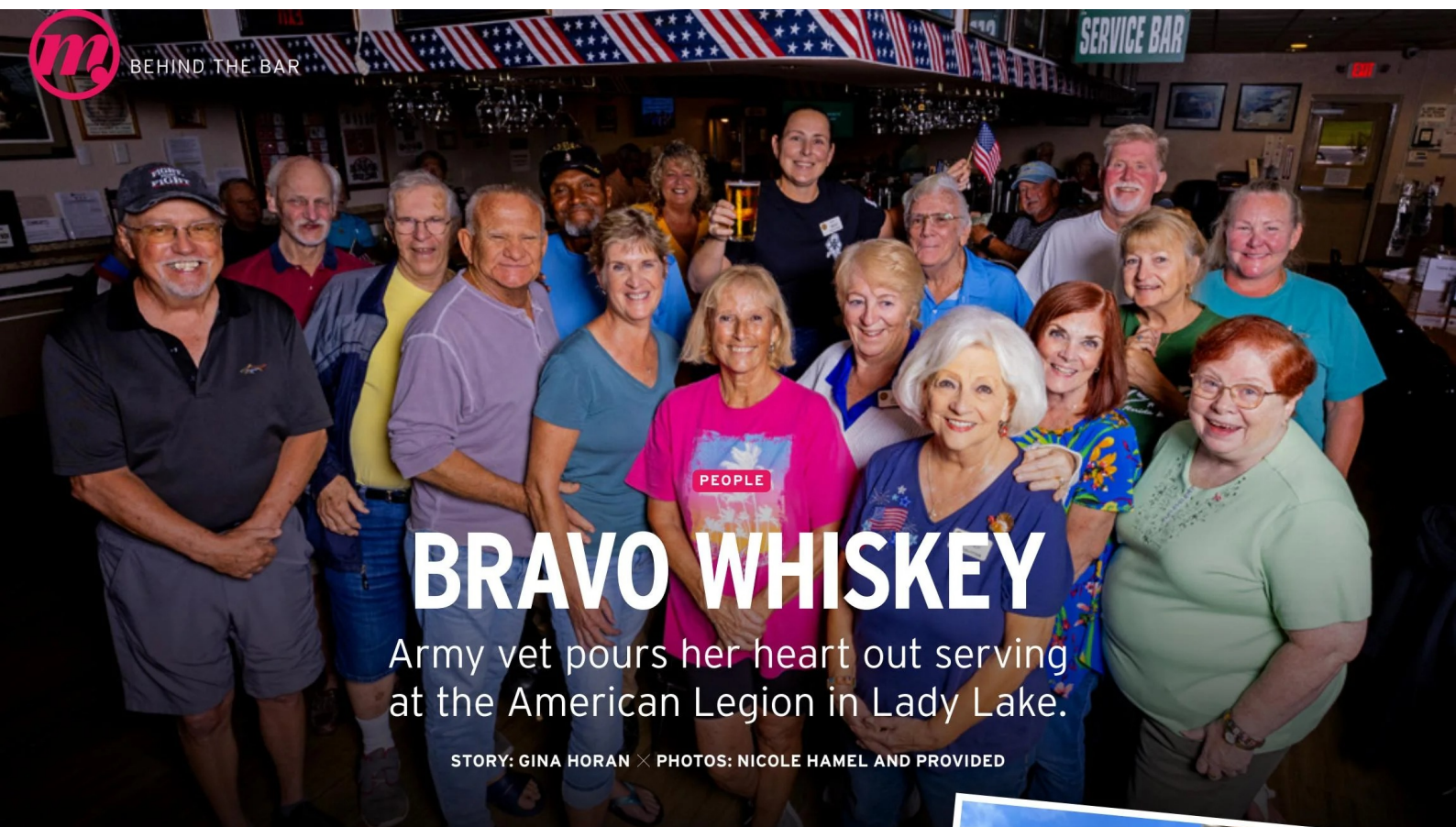
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ROXANNE BROWN



BEHIND THE BAR



BRAVO WHISKEY

Army vet pours her heart out serving at the American Legion in Lady Lake.

STORY: GINA HORAN × PHOTOS: NICOLE HAMEL AND PROVIDED

Sgt. Becky Pilipow enlisted in the army in 1999 at age 18, served in Iraq in 2003-'04, and was honorably discharged in 2007.

In 2023, right before her 42nd birthday, she realized she had a chance to return to the military.

"I found out I could reenlist at that age so I jumped at the chance," Becky says. "I missed doing something completely different, like the adventure and travel, and let's face it, the benefits are good for my family."

Becky owns and operates Edible Arrangements in Oxford with her wife, Rachel Neck.

She has also found a second family through her part-time job tending bar at the American Legion, Veterans Memorial Post #347 in Lady Lake.

"Because I'm a female, most people think I'm an auxiliary

member when they first meet me," she says. "When they find out that I'm active-duty military, there is sort of an added respect and camaraderie."

Surrounding herself with fellow vets has been a blessing. She illustrates that point with a story about when she was stationed at Fort Jackson in South Carolina during a cold spell.

"We had to march a lot so I wrote a letter to the post and asked for some thick socks," she says. "All of the sudden, dozens of socks arrived in the mail for the entire company."

Post #347 is home to approximately 7,000 legionnaires — including 307 women — as well as 2,700 auxiliary members and 1,000 Sons of the American Legion, which makes Lady Lake's post the largest in the world.

Post #347 is also one of the most generous. The post provides the hall

YOU CAN FIND BECKY BEHIND THE BAR THURSDAYS AND SATURDAYS



to any legionnaire to use free of charge, opens the parking lot as an emergency landing pad for helicopters and donates equipment for disabled members.

"There are dozens of great things that our post does for the community," Becky says. "I especially admire the Honor Flight program and I hope to volunteer for that sometime."

"We just lost Jim Lyons, a WWII vet who got to go and meet the President before he passed away and that was special for all of us."

To find out more about Post #347 visit www.florida-legion.org. 📍

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Stavro's
3223 US Hwy. 441
352.315.0028

The Rose Plantation
200 Rose Ave.
352.805.4340

GROVELAND

Red Wing Restaurant
12500 S. SR 33
352.429.2997

Barrels & Boards
7965 SR 50 A500
352.557.5007

HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS

JB Boondocks Bar & Grill
704 S. Lakeshore Blvd.
352.324.3600

Mission Inn's La Hacienda Restaurant
10400 CR 48
352.324.3910

Mission Inn's Nicker's Clubhouse Restaurant
10400 CR 48
352.324.2718

LADY LAKE

Bamboo Bistro
700 US Hwy. 441
352.750.9998

El Ranchito
1 Lagrande Blvd.
352.750.3335

Gators Dockside
1004 Main St.
352.430.1377

Harbor Hills Country Club
6538 Lake Griffin Rd.
352.753.7000

Latin Flavors Bar & Grill
13769 US Hwy. 441
352.561.4002

Marco's Pizza
13721 US Hwy. 441
352.775.1500

Oak Wood Smokehouse & Grill
860 S. Hwy. 27/441
352.751.5640

Takis Greek and Italian Restaurant
13761 N. US Hwy. 441
352.430.3630

LEESBURG

Brooklyn's Pizzeria
27405 US Hwy. 27
352.728.2020

Cousin Vinnie's Family Sports Restaurant
10700 US Hwy. 441
352.253.2442

Donut King
708 S. 14th St.
352.805.4888

El Ranchito Mexican Cuban Restaurant
911 W. North Blvd.
352.460.0123

Great Chicago Fire Brewery & Tap Room
311 W. Magnolia St.
352.474.2739

HP Grill
1403 S. 14th St.
352.314.0006

Ichiban Buffet
10301 US Hwy. 441
352.728.6669

Kawachi Sushi & Bar
10601 US Hwy. 441, Ste. C12
352.431.3449

La Palma Mexican Grill
1690 Citrus Blvd.
352.323.1444

Luna Azul
1341 S. 14th St.
352.805.4174

McCracken's Irish Pub
719 W. Main St.
352.460.0659

Mystic Ice Cream
314 W. Main St.
352.812.1366

Naples Italian Restaurant
1107 W. North Blvd.
352.323.1616

Oak Wood Smokehouse & Grill
27745 US Hwy. 27
352.435.4633

Prime 3 on Main
610 W. Main St.
352.314.0015

Rodello's Italian Restaurant
26736 US Hwy. 27
352.319.8093

Ski Beach
21 Dozier Cir.
352.973.0793

The Brick & Barrel Public House
209 W. Main St.
352.431.3069

The Coffee Snob
1101 W. North Blvd.
352.460.4570

The Old Time Diner
1350 W. North Blvd.
352.805.4250

The Sipping Garden and Bistro
605 W. Magnolia St.
352.460.0716

Wolfy's
918 N. 14th St.
352.787.6777

MOUNT DORA

Barnwood Country Kitchen & Smokehouse
3725 W. Old US Hwy. 441
352.630.4903

Fiesta Grande
421 N. Baker St.
352.385.3540

Magical Meat Boutique
322 N. Alexander St.
352.729.6911

Vincent's Italian Restaurant
5914 Orange Blossom Trl.
352.735.4578



Latin Flavors serves palate pleasing dishes from The Caribbean and Mexico.

There are so many Latin-inspired choices on the menu, it's hard to decide which plate to try at Latin Flavors Bar & Grill in Lady Lake. Owner Roberto Diaz and Chef Luis Ramos blend tradition, innovation and family recipes by offering cuisine from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Mexico. Manager Mariam Pacheco recommends her favorite dishes: El navideño, Cuban sandwich, skirt steak, red snapper and mofongo with fried pork chunks. Customers rave about the mini empanadas sampler, fried cheese with guava sauce and stuffed fried plantain cups. Beer and wine are also available, along with outside seating and delivery through Slice. Tropical Rhythm Restaurant & Sports Bar, their second location, is now open at the Lake Square Mall in Leesburg.

➔ **Latin Flavors Bar & Grill** / 13769 Hwy. 441 / Lady Lake / 352.561.5002

OXFORD

Candelaria Eatery & Café
4059 Thomas St., Unit A01
352.399.2329

Pho Saigon
11717 US Hwy. 301
352.492.9423

TAVARES

Bella Nonna Pizzeria
280 Silverado St.
352.508.9370

BTW (Burgers, Tacos & Waffles)
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352.508.9287

Fish Camp Lake Eustis
901 Lake Shore Blvd.
352.742.4400

Hurricane Dockside Grill
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352.508.5137

Puddle Jumpers
111 W. Ruby St.
352.508.5862

Tiki West Raw Bar and Grill
118 W. Ruby St.
352.508.5783

THE VILLAGES

Cody's Roadhouse Brownwood
3731 Meggison Rd.
352.430.2926

Cody's Roadhouse Lake Sumter Landing
1041 Lake Shore Dr.
352.259.8500

Haagen-Dazs Ice Cream
1001 Lake Shore Dr.
352.751.0261

Legacy Restaurant
17135 Buena Vista Blvd.
352.753.1475

Marco's Pizza
5806 Seven Mile Dr., Ste. 101
352.571.2400

NYPD Pizzeria
4046 Wedgewood Ln.
352.750.1994

Peachwave
249 Colony Blvd.
352.750.2238

Peterbrooke Chocolatier
1087 Canal St.
352.391.5877

RJ Gator's Florida Sea Grill & Bar
1015 Lake Shore Dr., #1693
352.751.6935

Roberto's Ristorante Pizzeria
2468 Burnsed Blvd.
352.626.1059

Sakura
265 Colony Blvd.
352.205.7393

TooJays Brownwood
2835 Brownwood Blvd.
352.350.2122

TooJays Lake Sumter Landing
1129 Canal St.
352.430.0410

VKI Japanese Steakhouse and Sushi Bar
1004 Old Mill Run
352.259.9887

UMATILLA

The Mason Jar
37534 SR 19
352.589.2535

WILDWOOD

Napolinos
9811 US Hwy. 301
352.399.6825



Brooklyn's Pizzeria & Italian Restaurant

27405 U.S. HWY 27, LEESBURG | 352.728.2020 & 352.365.9004
MYBROOKLYNPIZZERIA.COM

When hit with a craving for authentic New York style pizza, there's no need to catch the next flight to the Big Apple. Simply visit Brooklyn's Pizzeria & Italian Restaurant in Leesburg and Owners James and Shawna Pancari will make you feel right at home with New York inspired vibes, décor, and flavors. Not only have they perfected the New York style thin crust people swear by, but they take pride in ensuring everything they serve is made fresh and from-scratch daily; including their pizza dough and sauces, strombolis, calzones, subs, salads, wings, specialty Italian and pasta dinners. Additionally, the restaurant is family-run and Veteran-owned, with James having served in the Coast Guard for 31 years. In honor of that, the dining room features a military wall, plus a 10 percent discount for Veterans, active members of the military, police, fire, and first responders. Brooklyn's Pizzeria also offers gluten-free pizza and pasta options, and accepts DoorDash, online-ordering, catering, and curbside pickup.

Mon, Wed, Thu
11:00am - 8:00pm

Friday
11:00am - 9:00pm

Saturday
12:00pm - 9:00pm

Sunday
12:00pm - 8:00pm

**Live music
on Thursdays
5:00-7:00pm**

Closed Tuesday



Guru Indian Restaurant

CLERMONT HILLSIDE TERRACE, 2400 S. U.S. 27, SUITE 101, CLERMONT
352.241.9884 | GURURESTAURANTCLERMONT.COM

Owned by Chef Uday Kadam, Guru has a following of fans who savor the delicious, award-winning Indian cuisine inside the restaurant's beautiful dining room filled with Indian décor and tables with linen tablecloths. Guru earned the prestigious Best Entrée award at the 2021 Taste of South Lake & Business Expo for its Chicken Tikka Masala, featuring boneless chicken pieces cooked in a Tandoor oven with tomato sauce, onion, aromatic herbs, spices, and served with Basmati rice. Guru also has tasty appetizers, Naan breads, vegan dishes, and a wide array of entrees, including Palak Paneer, a dish of homemade cubes of cheese cooked with spinach and fresh spices; Lamb Vindaloo of choice lamb cubes marinated in vinegar with potato and a blend of spices; and Tandoori Chicken Tikka, where the chicken is marinated in mild spices and yogurt. Additionally, Indian alcoholic beverages of Taj Mahal and Kingfisher are served at Guru, and the restaurant caters private functions, parties, and provides many delivery options for orders made online at mygurutogo.com.

Mon - Sat
11:30am - 10:00pm

Sunday
11:30am - 7:00pm



Kawachi Sushi & Bar

10601 US-441, SUITE C12, LEESBURG | 352.431.3449
KAWACHISUSHI.COM

Kawachi Sushi & Bar invites you to explore a World of Flavor in the Lakes of Leesburg shopping center. Owners David and Brenda Chen treat guests like family as they blend traditional Japanese cuisine with a twist of New York City cuisine, offering a menu that tantalizes taste buds and satisfies cravings. From a diverse selection of sushi and hibachi options to savory bento boxes, poke bowls and vegan delights, Kawachi caters to every palate. Customize your sushi experience or indulge in specialty rolls like the crowd-favorite "Sexy Jalapeno." Pair your meal with a vast selection of sake, plum wines or specialty cocktails from the expansive bar menu. With fresh ingredients prepared daily and personalized service, Kawachi promises an unforgettable dining experience. Now offering Happy Hour menu full of food and drink specials, available all day on Mondays and from 3pm-6pm Wednesday - Sunday. Join us for an adventure in culinary excellence, where every bite leaves you craving more.

Mon, Wed-Thur
11:00AM - 9:00PM

Fri - Sat
11:00AM - 9:30PM

Sunday
12:00pm - 9:00pm

Closed Tuesdays

**Happy Hour Food
& Drink Specials
Mon - All Day
Wed - Sun
3:00PM - 6:00PM**



La Palma Mexican Grill

1690 CITRUS BLVD., LEESBURG | 352.323.1444 | LAPALMAGRILL.COM

The entire staff invites you to a delicious dining experience at La Palma Mexican Grill. The recipes used for the restaurant's unique dishes are a blend of old-school traditions from Mexico, combined with culinary inspirations from California and Louisiana. Homemade Mexican entrees such as Tacos Azteca, carnitas, fajitas, Chori Pollo, tamales and more, are flavorful and prepared with only the freshest of ingredients. Sit comfortably in the beautiful dining room, the festive bar, or outside on the patio deck with a serene view of the grounds and of the fun wild animals that can be spotted in the trees. Enjoy fast and friendly service, reasonable prices, three-for-one margaritas all day, every day, and a party room, available by reservation, for large parties or meetings. Full menu at lapalmagrill.com. Call for daily specials.

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352.314.0015 | PRIME3ONMAIN.COM | FACEBOOK: @PRIME3ONMAIN

The dream and concept of three lifelong physicians, Prime 3 on Main is a confluence of American, Asian, and Latin influences in one world-class restaurant. Prime meats, prime rib, skirt steak, and seafood are our specialties. Our filet with black cherry port wine reduction sauce, or the Grouper Fromage, is unique and found nowhere else. Our Casa de Rosado Churrasco is a personal family recipe. Homemade Creme Brûlée and ice cream will complement your meal. Recently given the Award of Excellence from Wine Spectator Magazine as among the world's top wine and food restaurants, Prime 3 on Main has an extensive wine list and caters to small and large groups.



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Saturday
2:00pm - 9:00pm
**Reservations
Strongly
Encouraged**

Closed Sundays

Thursday is Ladies
Night with **\$7.00
drink specials!**



Rodello's Italian Restaurant

26736 U.S HIGHWAY 27, LEESBURG | 352.319.8093 | RODELLOS.COM

Chef Amadeo Avila invites you to enjoy authentic and fresh Italian cuisine in a friendly, comfortable dining environment at Rodello's Italian Restaurant. The recipes used for his dishes are a blend of old-school traditions from Italy—with new culinary inspirations that Chef Amadeo has learned during many years in the restaurant business. Flavorful, homemade Italian entrees such as Pistachio Crusted Lamb, Salmon Saltimbocca, Lobster Ravioli, Shrimp Risotto, and many others are classics and prepared with only the freshest ingredients. The lunch menu features personal pizzas, calzones, subs, and pasta. Sit in the spacious dining room or enjoy drinks or desserts like delicious gelato in the cozy lounge, which features a full bar, wine menu, and an array of specialty cocktails. Always look for new features on Chef Amadeo's menu, available on the restaurant's website, Rodellos.com.

Open Daily
11:00am - 9:00pm





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LEESBURG EMBRACES BROOKLYN FLAVOR

Beloved family-owned pizzeria celebrates five years in Leesburg

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE



James and Shawna Pancari

Brooklyn's Pizzeria in Leesburg just celebrated its 5th anniversary and owners James and Shawna Pancari are proud to continue to offer the same high quality and authenticity that their devoted customers have come to love over the last half-decade.

"I'm originally from Brooklyn and my fellow New York transplants say that our pizzas are just like the pies they ate growing up," James says. "Now that we've been here for five years, we know that the locals appreciate the care we put into every dish," he adds.

Once inside, guests will notice the delightful aroma of freshly made pizza, savory garlic knots and simmering sauces while the friendly staff welcomes them with a smile.

The charm of Brooklyn's Pizzeria comes from the Pancari's close-knit, blended family and kids Maddy, Lizzy, Sara and James have worked hard to help keep the restaurant thriving since they opened in 2019.

"The kids have grown up with the business and a lot of this

wouldn't be possible without their support and dedication," Shawna says.

Brooklyn's has built their solid reputation on genuine customer service and a commitment to using fresh, quality ingredients.

"We do everything from scratch here," Shawna says. "We hand-prepare our veggies, run our mozzarella through the shredder daily and make our dough three times per day to ensure freshness."

The New York Style thin-crust pizza is the top-seller for both dine-in and take-out and customers love to build their custom creations from a variety of toppings and sizes. Sometimes it's fun to branch out and try one of their gourmet pies like tangy Buffalo chicken or cheese steak deluxe. Calzones and Strombolis are available as well as gluten-free options for pizza and pastas.

Traditional dishes like baked ziti and eggplant parmesan are available as well as savory chicken marsala and popular fan favorite fettuccini alfredo. Rounding out the menu is a variety of appetizers, saucy wings, fresh salads, classic hoagies and desserts as well as

an impressive beer and wine selection.

Brooklyn's Pizzeria invites you in for a taste of New York as they continue to build a family legacy of quality and taste.



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- If you don't call, they'll try reaching you. If you're unreachable, they'll contact a neighbor or relative, and if necessary, a Deputy Sheriff will be sent to your home.

HOW TO JOIN:

- Call the Lake County Sheriff's Office at **352-343-2101** with your name, address, phone number, age, medical condition, and nearby friends or relatives.



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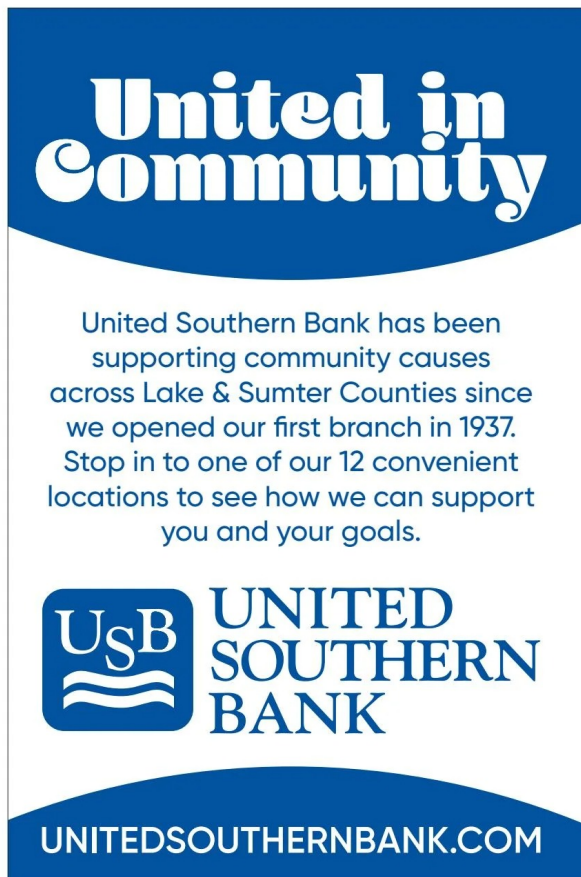
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HOSTED BY

Gina Horan

Gina is a seasoned media professional who brings a wealth of experience and a dynamic perspective to The Healthy Living Podcast and the Style team. Passionate about connecting with local experts and sharing their insights, she engages Central Florida audiences with an educated and holistic approach to body, mind, spirit, and finance.

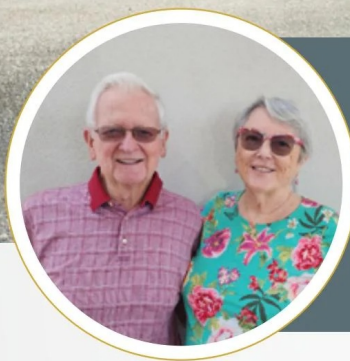
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PASSION

Shelf Indulgence

So many books,
never enough time.

STORY: CYNTHIA MCFARLAND

As last year ended, I hit 65 on my list of books read in 2024. Go ahead, call me a book nerd. Yes, I keep track of what I've read. All the easier to remember authors I especially like and memorable novels to recommend.

I was the kid who fell in love with reading early on. The joy of losing myself in a great story has never faded.

I vividly remember discovering the magic of books. I was 7 years old tucked into my dad's chair reading a mystery about wild horses and kids on a ranch. I was amazed to realize that a book could take me far beyond the walls of my Tucson home. From that moment, I became an avid reader.

Mom took my brother and me to the library regularly. And books were always Christmas and birthday gifts. My brother wasn't as smitten by the written word. He became a pilot, while I found the career I'd dreamed of since elementary school.



The little girl who loved books grew up to be a woman who makes her living with words, and I couldn't be more grateful for that.

Sharing that passion comes naturally. Friends ask for book recommendations, and I love seeing them swept up in a great story.

I spent 22 years in a dynamic book club before it was sidelined by the pandemic. I missed being introduced to new authors and the insight gained from discussion, but I unexpectedly found this inspiration through a different avenue.

For a decade, I'd worked on marketing projects with a large advertising agency in California. One of the account managers was also a voracious reader. Somehow,

this came up in a conference call and we began sharing tidbits about favorite books. We've never met in person, and neither of us still works for the vendors that introduced us years ago, but our book-inspired friendship has endured. We call regularly to chat about life and what we're reading. I love getting an email from her announcing, "Just finished one of the best books I've read in years. When can you talk?"

No matter how busy life gets, I always have a book in progress and another on tap. That's the joy of reading because you love it, not because you "have to." I totally relate to the Frank Zappa quote, "So many books, so little time." ☹️

Hey, readers! Is there a particular subject that you would like me to write a commentary about? → Tell me, via email, at editorial@akersmediagroup.com.



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